

Jose Lopez: Alright we're recording. My name is Jose Lopez today is Thursday, March-- March -- May 20th, 2021 and I am interviewing Monique Vasquez through Zoom for the UCSD Race and Oral History Project. For the purpose of this project, to grant the University permissions to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Monique Vasquez: I do.

Jose Lopez: Thank you! Hello and welcome to the race and Oral History Project Monique. How are you feeling today?

Monique Vasquez: Hi. Thank you for having me and I am feeling better, as of today, so thank you for having me.

Jose Lopez: Well that's great to hear. Don't again, don't be afraid we're in this together, and then we'll know that the future generations get to hear your story. [Laugh] Right, to start off Monique, what are some of your hobbies and activities that you enjoy doing? These could be ones that you enjoy inside your house or some that could be outside of your house.

Monique Vasquez: I enjoy traveling a lot. It's one my favorite things to do, and especially in Mexico, so before the pandemic, my family and I traveled a lot. We've gone to many places, San Miguel de Allende, Guadalajara. Many like touristic places because my mom, my parents, both of my parents, like to have us feel connected to where they come from and just to know the history and the beauty of it, not just what's portrayed in the media and the news, which is often villainizing the country. Not to say that it's not present but just to not neglect the fact that it does have a lot of history, and it is beautiful in its own right. And that to me is one of my favorite things to do. In addition to that, I do-- do art in my free time. I also love to not just see different types medias of arts, which is the regular painting, but I also do love to see movies and dissect them, so I actually do like to learn about the directors and kind of this different styles of, movie-making that they do. So for me those are the [laugh] my most joys in life. So, I really do enjoy learning about those things and traveling, so yes.

Jose Lopez: Wow! So so fascinating and yeah. Talking about Guadalajara right?

Monique Vasquez: Yes.

Jose Lopez: Is there any memory in specific that stands out to you?

Monique Vasquez: Yes, so, while visiting Guadalajara, I did not know actually that my grandfather is from, from my maternal grandfather, he is from Aguas Calientes. So when we actually went to visit Guadalajara we went to Acambaro, and we got to visit some of his family, which I had never met in my life. And I was really happy because I think one of the things that I really did like to learn was about my family history and I had never learned about his, especially. I'm more connected to my closer maternal side of the family which is just my grandparents and then my aunts and uncles. So I had never known that there was more to my family and to get to

learn about that and kind of hearing stories of his childhood kind of brought me a little bit closer to my family and that felt amazing and I was really happy.

Jose Lopez: Wow! It's great to hear, actually going out to learn about your family, your family's history. That's pretty fun. How about you tell me you like other forms of media, since you like doing art, what movie do you like the best?

Monique Vasquez: Oh my god. I like so many, but as of right now I was rewatching a lot of the Marvel Cinematic. I know it's probably cliché but I really do enjoy them just because the artistic view that like from an artistic point of view, the director did a great job. A lot of the times, through movies, you see a lot of the male gaze with women. It happened a lot with DC and learning about the different mechanics of directing, especially in the Marvel cinematic that was also true, not just to the stories, but to the plot lines and just the way it designed, for me those movies, are like amazing for their production and their values, so that was great.

Jose Lopez: I'm also a Marvel nerd here myself so, I'm excited about the future and that actually paints a lot of insight into how you view the world. Thank you, Monique. So at the opposite of hobbies and your past times is an education or a formal job. Can you tell me about your current education or a job that you hold at the moment as well?

Monique Vasquez: So actually I don't have a job. My parents don't actually let me have a job until I'm in college. But as in for education, I am a senior in high school. I will be going to college in the fall and for most of my high school education, I think that there was a really big struggle for me academically, which for me, I think helped me a lot. [Laugh]

Jose Lopez: [Laugh]

Monique Vasquez: ... I think not many people see it that way, but I really do think that without me struggling constantly, I don't think I would have not just found the relationships, but the right connections to help me through it and I do value that a lot so, yeah.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. That- That's actually pretty good because I, again, I hear the stories that oh people get discouraged after failing and then don't want to try again but looks like you turned that idea on its head and that's pretty good. In so, where do you want your education to take you, in other words, what do you want to do with your education?

Monique Vasquez: Oh so many things, but in specifically, I, I, have been thinking a lot and reflecting upon that question a lot recently and I think that I would like to in the future, become a psychiatrist. Potentially, getting my PhD and going to Medical School but also within, you know, the decades to come to essentially have a nonprofit organization for myself and programs that extend from that. Kind of helping lower-income communities like Barrio Logan and helping the Latino community more specifically or minorities, specifically. Giving them resources to mental health resources, as there is a large stigma behind it. I grew up a lot around, you know, I've

been a part of peer counseling, so for me mental health is a really big thing and just something I feel really passionate about, so I hope that my career eventually finds its way there.

Jose Lopez: Wow. What-- you got some goals there set. That's pretty good as a high school senior. Can you tell us about where you're going to college in specific and tell us why you chose that college?

Monique Vasquez: Yes, so I am to San Diego State University. I initially chose San Diego State University because my brother is also attending, but besides that I have grown up being around that college. We-- I've gone to many events that are part of the college. I participate in a six-week intensive program for language, which let me around that that environment, and I just really enjoyed the community. And just, the distance from home, I am going to be staying home, so for me that's a really big thing. So I, I was really happy with my choice. It's a great college, and I think that for me that is-- my-- I felt right choosing that college. So for me, that was my choice.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. Sometimes families are leading part in your education and it has been for mine, so I applaud you, and then I hope you do well in college. As a fourth-year senior, I know you could do it. Building off of this, education and commitment to college, what would you say is your strongest characteristic as a result of your current education or your future generation [education].

Monique Vasquez: Oh my. I think, a characteristic is probably... my... I want to say compassion and simply because I think that I have faced a lot of adversity in my life that has caused me to really have to view the world in a very completely different way and has made me, just not view things as just one-sided and and find compassion for others, even if it's not the right situations. And I think for me that that was a very big thing growing up that I had to understand myself: to be compassionate. It's not something that I think, I would have learned without, without going through the things I've gone through in life. So for me, I think that's the biggest characteristic.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. So you talked about how growing up you had to feel compassion. Does your family play a role in that in any way, shape, or way or form?

Monique Vasquez: Yes they do, a really big one. I-- I-- I'm very close to my family, so, for me, being around them, growing up, being close to them, kind of made me, very aware of how different we are, just because we're-- we have all very strong personalities and I think them, viewing the world in in the way they do, I think it helped me a lot to create who I am now, at least parts of who I am. And I thank them immensely because I think that without them and without their help guiding me, it would have been very difficult, getting to my point-- to this point in my life, so yeah.

Jose Lopez: And sometimes, family's the backbone we need in life and that's where we stem our characteristics from. Thank you, I-- I-- I-- I would say the same as well. [Laugh] and since we're on the topic of family and we briefly touched this about earlier, how would you describe

your personality? You said that they-- we-- have strong-- each of them have strong personalities, how would you-- can you elaborate on that, please.

Monique Vasquez: Yes. So, my family-- So I have both my parents and I have a brother and a sister, both older. They are extremely, strong, in the sense that they, both my brother and sister, they had to mature immigrant children, they have to mature rather faster, than most children and they kind of became this authoritative figure for me and I had to quickly learn that in my family, we had to all always be together. We always had to have each other's backs and in describing my family, I think I would say they're very resilient and they're very crazy in the-- in the-- in the very best connotation of that word. They're, I think the people I realized the most on and I know that you know, just their-- the closeness that I have to them I'm very thankful to have that and they are amazing people that I admire a lot.

Jose Lopez: Wow. Such an inspiring saying, but that's the truth. This is the country we live in and immigrants are a big part of this country. Speaking on the roles, what role do you fit in your family?

Monique Vasquez: Oh that's a very [laugh] interesting question. I play more of the caregiver in my family. I, you know, being the youngest, I've-- I've had to take on the role of making sure that everyone is, okay, and making sure that, you know, I-- I help my parents out as much as I can, at the same time, making sure that my siblings are dealing with the change that we go through, at a rather, as best as they can, and just being a-- a-- a listener for them. I think, in my relationship that has grown with my siblings I have been that person that just for them to listen to for their issues and all the things but also, just, I think I've become the person that to them I-- I-- I think they think they take care of me, but in reality, I also like to think that I take care of them, because I think that they all each have their own lives, but I-- I-- I kind of remind them that we have to be together and we're still family. So I think that for me that's-- that's kind of like the-- the role I play in this whole situation.

Jose Lopez: So you're like the medium. I guess glue that sticks everyone together.

Monique Vasquez: Yee, kind of and sometimes peacemaker, but yes. [Laugh]

Jose Lopez: [Laugh] So you said-- we talked about family, we talked about yourself, and then we talked about your goals, but do your goals differ from, uh-- do your family goals differ from that of your own, or is still under the same umbrella?

Monique Vasquez: It's-- I'd like to think that it's still under the same umbrella. One of the biggest thing is for my-- my family, especially for my parents is, to not just find something that I'm passionate about, but to make sure that the path I take in life is-- is-- is the one that I-- I'm willing to complete and the one-- the one that I'm willing to, you know, fight for and-- and continue on, because my-- my parents have always made very clear that, whichever path I choose, I have to, you know, make sure that is-- that is what I want be 100% sure. Whether it's going to college, I have to make sure that, you know, if I go to college, I have to finish it and be

resilient, and I think that in certain-- in certain parts of it, I agree with it, but for the most part, I'm okay with-- with that aspect for what I want to do. Sometimes I don't agree with, you know, always having to stick to one thing, you know, you might take different paths and it's not all, you know, completing, but I think that, above all, is just having a passion and having a career that, I-- I love, I think that's for them, the best for me.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. That's totally fine. You want to become a psychiatrist, there's no straight path to it, there's multiple paths and then you just find the one that best suits you.

Monique Vasquez: Yes.

Jose Lopez: Okay. Thank you, Monique. That's actually really, really important and I guess really insightful. [Laugh] One can argue that a family is a mini-community where everyone plays a specific role. However, a community can also be a city, or a town, a collection of streets, people from similar ethnic backgrounds, or just people who are like-minded. Monique, what do you-- what community do you belong and what relationship do you have with it?

Monique Vasquez: I think that I belong to the Latino community, just because I-- I-- I-- I've had to, you know, move a lot in my lifetime. So for me, a certain, you know street-- collection of streets are just like a physical community. It has been harder through the years, so for me just having that connection to-- to the Latino community has always been my biggest, strength in life because I-- I am able to connect with them and-- and build those-- the bridge to-- to my past and-- and to my family's past. It's very important to not lose sight of that for me that that-- I think that community and always being there wherever I go there was always that extension of community and I think that-- that brought a lot of comfort and-- and the change especially when I was younger. Knowing that the person I was going to talk to also spoke Spanish, because that is my first language you know that-- that brought a lot of kind of comforting, to the changes and I'm really thankful for that.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. The Latino community is everywhere. All you got to do is seek for it! So, how would you describe the current status of the Latino-- Latino community. Is it different or -- is it different from the past or still the same or is it still similar?-- Sorry, is it different from the past, or is it still similar follows same procedures from it?

Monique Vasquez: I think that there's a lot of similar aspects to the past. I think that there has been changes due to the changing, you know, generation z or generation x, you know, I think those have brought up a lot of, good movements, social movements that kind of have moved forward the Latino community and-- and started to make waves in the socially acceptable norms but I do think that there are still some remaining kind of especially in the machismo kind of norm, that is very prevalent even in Mexico itself. I think that that is still very prevalent and-- and just very present and that still hasn't really changed that much because, as unorthodox as a family may be there's always some kind of, leftover, what would you call it, cultural norms that-- that exist, but I do think that there is change and I'm really happy for the change. There's a lot of acceptance I feel now in-- in the community. And I think that-- that is some progress overall.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. I would say that I would have to agree. On-- on the topic of machismo we-- on it-- has, I wouldn't say infiltrated, but it has transcended borders, what would you-- what would be your posts to try to combat it, or at least try to disseminate it.

Monique Vasquez: I think learning that machismo is-- is an actual thing. That it takes many forms and-- and just educating, people that-- that machismo still exists today. I feel like you hear-- you-- you view history books, that were made in the 19 something and you kind of forget that it still exists and-- and that machismo whether it's you know, straightforward, a man, you know, kind of looking down on women, but sometimes it not. Sometimes it's just very micro-aggressive things that happen in interactions that you just don't see. I think, understanding and just acknowledging that there is machismo still out there is kind of the first step to just making sure that, that we are taught, that children are taught that the next generation understands the issues that are still going on.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. I think the first thing to change an aspect of things is identify or recognize it. Giving it-- being able to recognize it demonstrates to the population that hey it exists and it has been existing for the last x amount of years.

Monique Vasquez: Yeah.

Jose Lopez: Yeah, thank you for highlighting that Monique. To add, just finishing up this section, why do you think of the communities change. Why-- why do you think they-- some stuff changes some stuff doesn't change? Can you give me a little bit more insight about that.

Monique Vasquez: Yeah. I think-- I think communities change for-- for various reasons that are just the new-- newer generations that-- that use that-- use that is born into this community, often, because of their youth, we see the issues from outside. So in a community that the people that are already established there that the roots are already set, oftentimes don't see, their own-- the norms that are being set or just the different issues that are taking place in the community until someone from the outside, comes in and says hey look, this is happening, you have to acknowledge it, you have to change it. We have to be better, which oftentimes is not often met with-- is not always met with like open arms, that we all hope for, but I think that-- that is why we change so much because, you know, people come with other ideas, with newer ideas to either innovate the things that are already set or just to challenge the-- the-- the norms that are already there and-- and that is when, people becoming accepting when there's others like them. When-- when more and more people come with their stories and experiences, that is, when a change occurs and there's a shift in that dynamics that are placed in communities.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. Sometimes we need that one person to look-- from the outside to look in and be like hey, is this what y'all really wanted? And then you're like, don't talk to me like that and then you're like wait what maybe-- maybe they're actually right. So yeah I think that's really important when you might-- as a college student-- as a future college student, I think you'll learn more about that so keep an eye out for that.

Monique Vasquez: [Laughing] Definitely.

Jose Lopez: [Laughing] We briefly talked about yourself at a young age, is there-- is there a childhood-- how was your childhood, sorry, and do you have any fond memories that you have from your upbringing.

Monique Vasquez: Yes. So, in my earlier years, there was a-- there was a point in time where my family and I would travel back and forth to Mexicali back to San Diego and most of my family is from Mexicali, usually, it's from an ejido, which is like the outskirts of a town. Like it's so much smaller it's like dirt streets and things like that and I remember that we would go back and forth and during the summers we would actually stay there. And we would all go to my grandma's house which has like a small farm next to it so there was always animals. There were like sheeps always changing and I just remember, we would all just have lunch or dinner, but it was all with my family. It was my uncles, my cousins. We would play and it-- it was a very happy and joyous moment, and I think that for me those were the memories that I-- I kept with me, because there was a point in time where we had stop going, and you know immigration things change and for me that was very tough because you know I stopped seeing my family some of my family for many years. And you know those-- those memories were the ones that I kept alive in my head and were-- I was really happy to have experienced them because you know, I never knew, when I was going to see them again. and just being that house-- my grandma's house, she's still alive, thankfully, I'm still there. And I have gotten the chance to go back and every time I look at it and we-- some of us, you know, go and-- and spend time together, for me that's kind of like a revival of all those memories you know. Running around with the chickens, you know, chasing the chickens, or fighting the sheep, just you know, all these things it's-- it's a very, beautiful thing to remember, and it was really fun to experience.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. Sometimes our memories are the things that keep us connected at times, and I think that's the best way to describe it. But I will jump in a little bit on a setback you mentioned was immigration. If you feel comfortable about it, can you tell me how immigration affected your community and your family?

Monique Vasquez: Yes, so well, both of my parents are immigrants. I-- my siblings and I both born here-- born and raised here. However, during that time my dad had trouble fixing his immigration status which, he had I think his visa had expired, and we had to say here and he no longer could travel outside of the United States. My mom, at that time because none of my siblings were of age, 21, to be able to sponsor them in the process of becoming naturalized, my family-- my whole family, my mom, my dad, my siblings, we all had to stay here. So for many years, we had to stop seeing my family from-- from over there because-- as well as us, we could go back and forth, there was many of my family members that could not come to the United States whether it was because of the immigration thing or just because they didn't have the resources to come. So for many years, a lot of my family, I did not get to see. Which you know at that point, you really realize how immigration policies really affect a family and just you kind of can't help but reflect on how you're not the only family going through that and I think that kind of

something that stuck with me, just you know, upon all the hardships in life, that was, you know, one of the biggest ones that my family had to overcome and it's still overcoming because my-- my father still can't, cross the border, and it's been 20 years?... 20 years for him, since he seen a lot of his family, so it's-- it's hard, on my behalf because I know that we can't do anything until something changes, and I think that it's just heartbreaking you know, so yeah, I mean it's-- it's.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. Thank you Monique. I know this-- this question was a little bit hard to make amends with, but I want to thank you for being vulnerable because I understand like I- I- I as I- as a Mexican-- my parents are also Mexican immigrants, I- I totally get where you're coming from. Again, I want to thank you for being vulnerable and just shedding the truth on such a topic because things haven't changed and it'll be a matter of time when things changes but the problem is when? So for now, if you feel comfortable, would you like to take a pause, or we could just keep on carrying on with the interview.

Monique Vasquez: I think we just keep going.

Jose Lopez: Alright. Let's keep on going. I love the energy!

Monique Vasquez: [Laugh]

Jose Lopez: Alright Monique we're connected in this Zoom meeting and this meeting oh-- this just Oral History Project due to our mutual, I guess medium, being Barrio Logan College Institute. Can you describe how you got to know about Barrio Logan College Institute?

Monique Vasquez: Yes. So I was actually not in 3rd grade when I-- when I went in. My siblings actually got introduced. My mom was able to find about BLCI through a neighbor where we lived at the time and my siblings went through it, sadly, did not graduate from BLCI, my sister did however, and then during that time I went into third grade, which is like the-- the start where you actually apply. I applied and went to the interview, a couple of weeks later, I was accepted, and that-- that kind of started my whole relationship with BLCI. I saw-- I've seen it grow, and it's been a great eight years. [Laugh]

Jose Lopez: [Laugh] Wow eight years. Eight years. Whoah time flies in BLCI. So, again, you have eight years under your belt with BLCI and many more with your brother and sister being part of it how do you feel about their mission and the community work they provide?

Monique Vasquez: I think that-- that their mission is-- is outstanding. I-- I remember just first learning about it, you know, being taught, you know what the mission and-- and finding about what-- what they really were about. I think I was really inspired because that-- that kind of started off my whole academic career basing itself on giving back to the community and I think that shaped kind of what I want to do with my life, which is giving back to my community, and-- and I think they-- they always-- their mission has been, you know, to eventually close, but with the purpose of not having any more kids that need their help.

Jose Lopez: Mhm.

Monique Vasquez: ...And I think that-- that goal is it's-- it's one that is a it's a beautiful goal just because it-- it-- it really makes you see and understand that their-- their goals might never finish, but they are helping so many kids and they're providing so many kids with the opportunity to achieve higher education with-- which in our community, Latino communities is sometimes not the best statistics. And I think that you know, it's a very lovely thing to see grow and just experience.

Jose Lopez: Yeah when I read the mission statement when I first signed up for this class I was not only taken away but also like almost quite teary eyed because they're giving back to community of Latino students and people of color and trying to give them the opportunities they need to succeed, so from there from-- there on the students themselves-- alumni could take over and give back to community. And I think it's just beautiful in its own way, like you said Monique. Woo, that one hit a little close. Do you have any specific memories that stand out with while working with BLCI-- while being part of BLCI?

Monique Vasquez: Yes, and this one was a long long long time ago.

Jose Lopez: [Laugh]

Monique Vasquez: It was before we had this location we used to be in a very small location where the conditions during summer, I do not recommend but I-- I remember before I was-- it was actually before I went into BLCI, I-- I-- I think my siblings were still in it. They actually knew me. Like the staff members back then they knew me as the little girl who would just run inside calling my brother's and sister's name. I would just go in and be like "Oh mom's here," and I would just like run around the place like it was a playground. And, I was very outgoing child so I would just talk with the staff and I would-- I remember how easy it was to just interact with them and how comfortable, I felt, which I think is a very hard thing to do as a student in-- in-- you know later-- for students that go in and out at later years. But as you go in you don't that and for me, I was very comfortable and I just remember just not feeling, you know, like, I was a stranger or a foreigner, I was just in that in that-- in that moment I think I felt just like the sense of community and just family and for me that-- that is-- that kind of prompted to stay there.

Jose Lopez: Oh. The sense of family, I guess, in that family outside your regular family is what really hooked you up on BLCI. Wow that's-- [laugh] that's pretty cool. Well, maybe not running around and yelling [laugh] but...

Monique Vasquez: [laughing]

Jose Lopez: ...everything else, pretty cool. But yeah, since-- but at the last year we've had some drastic changes and quick changes due to COVID. There's a lot of moving pieces that complicated the goals of a group, of a community. How did Barrio Logan College Institute

respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to maintain the integrity and help their students and their community?

Monique Vasquez: Well, I think that the response overall was a very great one because at the beginning it-- you know schools went into the virtual world, they also went into virtual setting. They were able to provide resources, so they were able to provide links to tutoring sites to the tutoring Zoom's so you could just go in and-- and have a you know go into a breakout room with a tutor or just be with a tutor. I think that and as well as during this time they've been able to do continue with the programs that they had. You know, I was a part of the leadership Council, so I was able to continue that for the time that I was in that council-- council-- council. But I was-- I was-- I-- you know Circulo de Mujeres was still going on and-- and Circulo de Hombres which those both programs are incredible resources for the younger, you know middle schoolers and even like incoming high schoolers. Even as a senior I think it's a great resource to have and the fact that they were able to still continue it through Zoom and make it effective for those joining I think was a great thing to do. And just the workshops as well, I-- I really like the workshops.

Jose Lopez: Yeah you talked about Circulo de Mujeres and I've been-- I've heard conversations that I'm on the Tuesday meetings. Can you describe a little bit more what Circulo de Mujeres and Círculo de Hombres are for our audience?

Monique Vasquez: Yes. So Circulo de Mujeres is a-- is a program, student-led, at BLCI where girls are able to go and meet and talk about issues concerning being a woman of color and whether it's at school or-- or just in general. Oftentimes topic of discussions are not always set, you can go and sometimes they do activities in which you can then say, you know, "Hey like, you know, I'm having this issue" and it's just a very safe space for women to go and just talk about you know, having a shoulder to just cry on or just talk to, vent, you know it's just a very safe space. Which is equally done for-- for-- for Circulo de Hombres, which is where boys go and-- and talk about whether it's, you know, their what it's like to be a man in this-- in this country, or just you know, Latino boy, whatever they're kind of like interests are, that is a safe space for them to talk to. And I know that Círculo de Hombres has done a lot of events and each group has been able to do bonding times because essentially they-- they become the support system for you. And I, that's a-- that's a great thing to have, especially in-- in our communities where sometimes you know going to different places and-- and there's a lot of guest speakers that attend so it's a good resource to have...

Jose Lopez: ..Ooh, guest speakers. Yeah and I've been part of them and then I-- I-- I could tell even as a college student these-- these materials and these presentations that they give are impactful to college students, and so I wonder how big of an impact it is you, high school students. Thank you, Monique. So... speaking about BLCI and you're about to graduate-- graduated from BLCI in a month. Do you think you still be-- you're still be well connected to BLCI? You said that you want to do some charity work, but at the same time, you're going to become a college student. Do you think you'll be able to balance that dynamic?

Monique Vasquez: I think so. I've been apart-- well from my academic career I've-- I've gone to school is really rigorous in academic, you know, coursework and things like that. So I think as a college student I really hope to go back and-- and whether it's just attending workshops and giving advice on being a freshman in college or just anything that they need, I want to make sure that I also give back to, you know, them because they've offered-- they've given me so many opportunities that I-- I-- I feel indebted to them and just I'm honored to be able to go back and say hey like I'm-- I'm one of the many results of-- of BLCI and I want to help you guys too. So I'm-- I'm really excited and I think that you know going into college, regardless of the coursework I'll always be there for BLCi just as BLCI was there for me.

Jose Lopez: Like you said it's your second family, of course, you're going to give back. They gave-- they gave you everything you needed to succeed and now that you are succeeding, why not give back? Thank you, Monique. We've talked about COVID and affecting BLCI, how has COVID affected your family in specific?

Monique Vasquez: Oh man.

Jose Lopez: Ooh.

Monique Vasquez: No, yeah. COVID...made my family closer, believe it or not. I had mentioned that we were closer, we were a lot closer now. I think that being stuck in a place with their family for extended amount of times, regardless of like the feud stuff we've gone into, I think it's an-- an interesting place to be in. And interesting because I think that a lot of the times we are so into our lives that we kind of separate a little from each other or-- or just keep our own lives, just to ourselves. But I-- I've been closer to my sister now. We got a dog, which was very interesting...experience. Because we were all just freaking out over the fact that we had now a dog. But, just like how I got closer to them, we did see the impacts of-- of COVID on us. You know, economically, because we do-- we're not a middle-class family, we are a low-income family. So, we are-- my-- our income is always fluctuating even without COVID. So and, as my dad as a business owner he, sadly, you know lost his business. So for us, economically, it was-- it was a very-- something we had to adapt to. Socially, I think, overall, I think we dealt with it pretty great. I think that, you know, we got closer, which was-- is what matters. But I think overall...it was okay. It wasn't horrible.

Jose Lopez: Woah. I wasn't prepped-- [laugh]. Yeah. I understand, again, this question is a little vul-- making you-- putting you on the spot, making you feel vulnerable and I totally respect that. That's what-- it-- that's what COVID has been for the last year. Sacrifices have to be made. Stuff happens, but at the same time, things could also-- good things to come out of this and, like you said, family is what came out of it, and so the dog. Shout out to your dog.

Monique Vasquez: [Laugh] Oh yeah

Jose Lopez: [Laugh]

Monique Vasquez: A year-old now.

Jose Lopez: Aye!

Monique Vasquez: It's amazing.

Jose Lopez: [Laugh] Can you give any examples of what changes of-- that COVID brought became norms or just normal things that we-- you had to accept?

Monique Vasquez: I-- I probably had to-- to-- what became normalized was I kind of the-- the relationship that I have with my sister. I think you know I had mentioned before, how close but that kind of became normalized now. I'm just because I'm-- I think that, although our closeness before did have a distance, I think now I can just go up to her and-- and start talking to her and that to me is-- is means a lot just because in--in a situation where you're indoors most of the day. It was very impactful just in my mental health it, you know, mentally I kind of just [laugh] didn't have anyone to talk to, but it-- it also-- it also you know helped a lot. And another thing that became normalized a lot was being able to do assist my family and make them--making them food as a-- as a thank you language for me. I think before I-- I think I used to bake now I actually make meals, which I think is a form of progress, but, for me, that-- that is my thank you to them, that is the way that I see and-- and that, for me, became very normalized and I think they saw it, too, as we went to quarantine which I think has helped us also a lot just coping with everything that's been happening. And school has become very normalized virtually. Having to always be on my computer has definitely become normalized at this point. It's become a tool, like a necessity...

Jose Lopez: Yeah...

Monique Vasquez: ...never thought was going to happen, so I think that those were the most drastic ones that came out of this.

Jose Lopez: Yeah I would have to agree the same, that-- that my computer is my baby now. I want to pat on the back for-- thank you for putting up with me and all the rigorous work it provides. Well, thank you and Monique and to conclude what has COVID taught you and what tips, would you give to your fellow parents-- to fellow parents and students to keep on pushing forward?

Monique Vasquez: Oh man. I think COVID has just taught me to have patience. That change eventually comes around but that having patience and-- and making sure I keep myself connected, I think, was one of the things I learned because it's so easy to fall into this kind of this depressive state being indoors all the time. And I think that one of the things that helped us just having the few people that have around but also being able to just continue talking to them and-- and asking questions, and I think that is one piece of advice that I have for-- for parents and students is regardless of-- of being indoors to stay communicated with-- with-- family with friends, I still am communicating with my friends now. [Laugh] Like I'm always on the phone with them, but I-- I still have a way to-- to be with them and to also understand each other. I think

now we've all been placed in this equal playing field where we all understand where we're all are just mentally probably best. And I think before parents and children would often be like "Well you don't understand my work life, you don't understand my school life" and I think now we're placing the position when we understand what our parents go through, and I think they understand a little bit more our-- our academic life and how that affects us mentally and how fluctuating it is, and--and they are how-- how much of a roller coaster work is for them, so I think being patient with each other [laugh] and just understanding each other, I think those are incredibly helpful. I think yeah those are the tips that I would-- I would give. Just being there for each other, making sure that to realize that you know we're in this same situation so yeah [laugh].

Jose Lopez: Yeah it's like when your parents so you wouldn't survive a day in my shoes, like alright tell me about it, then.

Monique Vasquez: [Laugh]

Jose Lopez: And then since COVID hit, they kind of have to tell you about what their experiences are, and I think that's really important. And to like and then they understand where you're coming from like. I'm tired of zoom. I'm tired of classes like but I'm still going to keep on pushing whether I, like it or not because sometimes the goals are greater than the-- the pain.

Monique Vasquez: Yes, definitely.

Jose Lopez: Yeah. Alright, we are at the end of our time, I want to thank you, Monique, for not only participating but for just being vulnerable and understanding that these questions came sometimes came with a little more of a punch than I expected even I expected. But again, thank you for participating, thank you for BLCI for connecting us, and thank you for being present and actually, you know, having a meaningful conversation with me. Would you like to add anything else to where you thought you could have stated more added or add any last comments in specific.

Monique Vasquez: No, I don't think so thank you for having. Thank you for letting me be the interviewee I know that this is a very big deal.

Jose Lopez: [Laugh]

Monique Vasquez: Thank you for having me, and thank you for listening. I think that was one of the biggest things and-- and hearing my story, I hope it helps.

Jose Lopez: Yeah, oh don't-- don't worry, this will help the Race and Oral History Project for decades to come. People will understand your story. But again thank you, Monique, for showing up, thank you for having a conversation with me, I hope you have a good rest of your week. I hope you have a wonderful first year of college and if you ever need me just reach out. Okay?

Monique: Thank you.

Jose Lopez: Thank you.