

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Andres Tafoya

Interviewer: Daniela Sodre

Transcribed by: Andres Tafoya

Location: Zoom

Date: June 3rd 2022

Length of Interview: 34:10

AT-Okay hello, My name is Andres Tafoya it is June 3 2022 and I will be doing an oral interview with daniella Hello Daniela, can you please state your full name.

DS- hello, my name is Daniela Sodre

AT- Perfect perfect Okay, could you give me a brief introduction about yourself.

DS- Sure.

DS- I am a UCSD student. That's how I got to be invited to this interview. I am also from Brazil. I moved to San Diego about 12 years ago and I'm now 33 years old.

AT- Perfect perfect okay Oh, can you tell me a little bit of what it was like growing up in Brazil.

DS- sure.

DS- It was. It was bitter and sweet, at the same time.

DS- I love I love my heritage, I love speaking Portuguese and I miss being in Brazil, a lot, but at the same time upbringing was very, very difficult um.

DS- My um

DS- I was the youngest of five siblings and my mom um

DS- Had a you know both of my parents had a really difficult time umm.

DS-Raising us and, like through poverty and um.

DS- inequality and say so, it was a very difficult childhood in terms of my socioeconomic status.

DS- But in terms of um.

DS- enjoyment and and being a child iself being a child itself was fun I miss being a kid because we don't have to worry about paying bills doing laundry being an adult.

DS- I because it was because I had a lot of siblings umm we got to play a lot together and a lot of kids in the neighborhood would play in the streets, we didn't have access to computers, I mean didn't have any computers back then um.

DS- But it was it was nice to be able to.

DS- grew up playing freely on the street and yeah.

DS- yeah that's awesome sounds like a lot of fun inBrazil can you um, can you tell me a little bit about your family.

DS- Yes, um like I said I was the youngest of five.

DS-I have a lot of cousins both of my parents have a lot of siblings so I I like that aspect of having like a whole group growing up, we had a lot of support for each other, and a lot of community um.

DS- As I got older you know through my teenage years and my early adulthood both of my parents passed away and I had just endured life more on my own because, by then, my my older siblings were also getting married and having their own children umm.

DS- My mom um.

DS- was a hard work early early education teacher like a preschool teacher um.

DS- So it was nice I think that's why I wanted to become a teacher is because I saw.

DS- A lot of it on my mom although she didn't have like higher education umm

DS- She was able to really instill in me that um

DS- compassion and empathy towards kids um

DS- My father was a construction worker um

DS- We didn't have a very, very close relationship, but he was there you he was not an absent father, we just didn't have a lot of chance to bond, as I wish we would have umm

DS- And he passed away about he past away like when I was about 20, 22.

DS- Um and my mom passed away when I was 18

AT- Well, thank you for sharing that I really appreciate it umm I'm sorry about your parents, I know, it must have been difficult.

AT- So my next question is basically your whole transition to San Diego. How would you describe your journey to San Diego knowing that you know you were going to leave your family and friends behind, and you know travel to somewhere that's you know, like an unfamiliar town?

AT- Uh how would you describe that that whole transition?

DS- Sure um well like a lot of us.

DS- college students, we all kind of move we all experienced this.

DS- Moving away from family for me, I think it was a little bit more intense because um was moving solely on my own and without any means, like any resources and not knowing the language, I think that just added a little bit more layers of challenges um

DS- But I felt, I was just very, I guess, I was just a very courageous, I was about 21 when I moved here.

DS- At least I could drink.

DS- I was about 21 didn't speak any English because I um didn't have access to second language you know second second way, excuse me second language education back home in Brazil.

DS- But I was still fortunate enough to be able to get a visa and um

DS- made here, I came through a work exchange program and this program we were allow we were allowed to move to to a city in the US for three months, and then you know.

DS- use these three months as much as you know as well as we could, and I got a job, my very first job was a McDonalds so as soon as I got here.

DS- Even though I couldn't speak English I could kind of understand Spanish because it's close enough, so I remember going to this umm

DS- This Mcdonald's down Pacific beach and telling the manager, that it was Brazilian and back then, there was this very famous Brazilian soap opera.

DS- Called O Clone.

AT- Oh ok

DS- And if you have heard of it, it was about like this um

DS- Young boy that was cloned, and I mean it's a subpar right, so it became really, really famous in Mexico, so the way that a lot of um

DS- The way that the manager of this restaurant bonded with me is that she go, oh you are from Brazil, you know the soap opera and then I knew, because I had watched it when I was a kid.

DS- So we started talking about that and then luckily she hired me right on the spot thinking that I was capable of like talking to people and taking their orders.

DS- So it was kind of funny to remember that my very first day was just as a cashier and I didn't know what you know, like the only thing I knew was tomato because it sounds the same in Portuguese but um

DS- I remember the first interaction with a.

DS- A porch a customer that um

DS- was an English was just a disaster, I wouldn't understand like extra cheese no Pickles um

DS- And then I remember, I remember, making a really big mess out of that order and then right away, should notice I didn't speak any English um

DS- because she had only spoke.

DS- Portuguese, Spanish, with me.

DS- So then she put me back on the grill and that's how I learned how to make good hamburgers, and so I worked there for a couple of months, and then I figured.

DS- You know I need to make a little bit more money in order to.

DS- Pay my rent and support myself in San diego so I started looking for other jobs um

DS- And I did several things, then I worked as a dishwasher I work as a car washer I worked as a nanny as a cleaner and whatever it could get because within the very first months I had to switch from being a work exchange visa, like a student exchange.

DS- Visa to a student visa and in order to be a student, you have to pay through schooling, so I needed to pay to study English.

DS- And so I did uh I studied at a

DS- Private school down in old town.

AT- wow.

DS- and I did that for a couple of years and I did a little bit of everything, so I became a.

DS- a jack of all trades then um

AT- Wow.

DS- Slowly learned the language and but I was in love with the city, it was in love with the weather, I was in love with.

DS- You know the fact that it was in a different country, and it was learning a new language, and it was hard, yes, especially financially and being alone, but at the same time, I was still very um

DS- enchanted by being in a different environment um

DS- I think.

DS- The second, third, and so forth that's when I started to feel it okay now I know the language of what's next and it didn't have the means to move to what it was next that's when things are really getting really difficult emotionally and mentally um

DS- But I made it through it it's been 12 years and and it's been great.

AT- Wow that's very impressive um yeah I couldn't imagine moving somewhere else, where I couldn't even speak the language that's that must have been such a big challenge I I i'm very amazed of and how you handled all this like you're you're very strong person for sure um

AT- How would you um

AT- Other than language what other obstacles did you face when you got here to San Diego like did you have problems like finding housing, transportation, maybe paying your bills like how how was how were those struggles?

DS- No, I I feel.

DS- Not knowing the language, it was a big barrier because.

DS- I couldn't not all not all jobs were available for somebody who didn't speak English.

AT- Right

DS- Actually so, but then besides, not knowing the language, I would say the solitude, of course, the lack of social support.

DS- it was difficult and back then I didn't ever I mean we didn't really use whatsapp we didn't really use instagram or even like we're barely used Facebook and I didn't even have a computer, so I remember having a really hard time communicating with my family back in Brazil.

AT- Right

DS- Not into after a little while that I was able to have my own computer and have good access to Internet that you know um

DS- it's kind of strange to think about it, but yes it wasn't as easy to stay in touch, because I feel like if you stay in touch, it ended up being a little bit easier in your mental health, because you have people like now, we have everybody on our fingertips.

AT- Right. right

AT- No you're you're 100% correct yeah that.

AT- You know, having uh

AT- Support from your family is extremely important and yeah it must have been very.



AT- Challenging to like not be able to.

AT- You know, have somebody you know to rely on right away, or just be able to talk to them like on a daily basis.

AT- Like whenever you needed help

DS- Yeah.

AT- Nice Thank you so much for sharing that.

AT- Okay, so um.

AT- How were how did you find the social support that you needed what were some ways in which you, you receive the help that that you needed here in San Diego?

DS- Good question I.

DS- I would say what I started doing is, which was kind of hard, because at first I feel like a lot of the.

DS- Especially like per say the first job I got it's uh McDonalds um most of the workers, there were from Mexico and.

DS- It was great to connect with them, but first of all they're a bit older and they have lived in in San Diego for a little bit longer, and although they offer some support it was still not the support that could really really relate to right, so what I did is, there was this little Brazilian store um

DS- In pb it's no longer no it's no longer there, but I remember coming in and kind of just introducing myself, and it was another Brazilian owner and we bonded and she kind of felt like well you don't have anyone here letting me help you out and.

DS- So then she took me to She invited me over to a church reunion like a church gathering and I went to the church and.

DS- I would say at the beginning, especially at the beginning that's where I got most of my support it was from church and everyone at church, they were all Brazilian so it was such a relief to find that um

DS- Because.

DS- It was because it was hard, it was hard to find people that were.

DS- It was hard to find that a place where I could find a little bit of belonging and I found that when I met the people from that church um

DS- Especially because a lot of times when what happens here in San Diego a lot is um

DS- Brasileians we get to get we tend to get just kind of.

DS- Misidentified, as you know, Argentinians, Peruvians, especially Mexicans, of course um, which is wonderful cause

DS- I am Latina, but at the same time, is not speaking the language or having some sort of different culture can also be a.

DS- A barrier um

DS- And I felt, and I would always have to tell people, no, no, I don't speak Spanish i'm not i'm not Mexican you know from Brazil and um

DS- And it was it was hard to find that because.

DS- We didn't have any place that it could go eat or a place that it could go and just kind of um

DS- gather, but until I found that people from the Church um

AT- yeah no that's that's understandable, thank you for sharing that and you're right um

AT- there's a lot of issues when other people um from other countries come over here and they're misidentified as.

AT- As Mexicans and that's understandable that happens, a lot of living in a border town here in San Diego thank you for sharing that and i'm happy that you were able to receive support, especially through the Church.

AT- it's really a nice of them.

AT- Okay um

AT- So I would like to.

AT- talk to you about your education and work.

AT- I know that.

AT- You had mentioned that you are a UCSD student.

AT- Can you tell me a little bit about the transition into how you got accepted to ucsc and, what is your major?

DS- Sure well it's kind of it's kind of so strange to.

DS- see that i'm graduating and one hand i'm like well i'm already 33 I should have it all figured out and there's even a little bit of I know when we compare ourselves to the young

DS- To to young students that are graduating at 21, 22 um

DS- But it was I remember when they first guy here, you know my dream was to be able to go to university and get a degree here, become a become you know, a professional here, but it felt like it was simply impossible and like it was just something so far fetched um

DS- That I remember going to SDSU once with a friend of mine just kind of take a walk around and ask about like how do I get in and what's the process, how do I become student here.

DS- And when I when they talked me through the process and everything that he had to do, I was like okay it's impossible, this is never going to happen to me.

AT- yeah.

DS- ucsd even like farther because, SDSU just sounded a little bit more um

DS- More possible because I had friends, you know I have met a couple people that graduated there.

AT- Right.

DS- And then ucsd was just for me was just kind of like yeah not even think about it um

DS- And, but when I was, I went to like continuing education, at Mesa college and they had like free English school.

DS- And after like a year taking English courses there alongside with paying for a private school.

DS- You know, I was told, yes, you can actually come to Community college and you know take those classes to general education choose your major than transfer.

DS- It was to still felt it you felt for me that it was a lot and in the process was just too long.

DS- But it just the fact that there was the Community college just made a little bit more possible it just felt good it just felt for me that it was going to take too long.

DS- It felt like it was going to take too long, and I could never get through it.

DS- But I did I enrolled when I was finally able to um

DS- get my Green Card and become a resident, which took several years um I was then allowed to enroll Mesa college and did my educational plan to get a degree in child development at first um

DS- But I still remember them looking through and telling me hey you have to take know the first semester that was

DS- Three classes than three classes then like four classes, it just it felt like the load was so much because I had to work.

DS- So working full time and trying to go to Community college, it was really difficult, and I think the hardest part for me was the very first week of taking like three courses I just had a breakdown I dropped everything I just dropped it

DS- So they stayed my student my educational plan I think that's why they call it, it looked so good and paper and looked like wow within two years i'll transfer and then within like maybe less than four years I'll get my degree.

DS- But it was the start, it was just like how can somebody do this like how um like working and.

DS- Taking all these classes and all the homework it's like why like i'm old, am I, why do I have homework it's just felt so silly

DS- So I dropped my very first semester I just dropped everything and it had a horrible like you know um imposter imposter syndrome crisis, and it just like yes i'll never be able to really um

DS- Have a career here and it felt like I should have moved back to Brazil and but at the same time I had just got my Green Card, so it should be really happy.

DS- Um so.

DS- I let go the very first semester, and then the second semester, I went back, but guess what Andres I took one class just one single class.

DS- And I was still struggling it was an English course was like English 101.

DS- And the Professor was wonderful, but she gave us a lot of work, especially a lot of writing and that's what I struggled the most while one of my classmates could get through a two three page, freewrite essay in like a couple hours, it took me it would take me a couple of days um

AT- Oh wow

DS- But she was very supportive and.

DS- She I remember coming to her office hours and cry and just.

DS- yeah poor her, I have to send her send her a ladder once once I graduate because I I really used her resources, but I did I my I got an A plus on my very first class.

DS- I think.

DS- And I used a lot of like the writing Center and I used tutors um

DS- Probably miss a lot of days of work to but I pushed through it and then the second semester took two courses and then the third semester at the three courses and just started getting more used to the system and and.

DS- Having better time management skills and becoming more involved with the with the Community college um

DS- And I was there for about four years.

DS- Not two years.

AT- That's ok

DS- But I just I felt like it was never going to end um but after I'd say after my my second year I got really, really involved and I became part of like different clubs and I was President of um

DS- Psi Beta and I became like really involved with the Professor so, then I didn't want to leave anymore um

DS- I just started finding more belonging, even though, like among the Latino Latinx students and the Brazilian students there um

DS- And then I had a really good um

DS- counselor um

DS- That really pushed me to apply to you know both SDSU and UCSD and I never felt like I was going to get in even though, my grades were good.

DS- I got a couple B's, you know I got a couple withdraws and I dropped some stuff but I was, I was overall really I had a good GPA, but I still felt like the fact that it was there for so long, was not going to make me look like a good candidate um

DS- So.

DS- And and and in one hand I had a couple counselors who were very supportive and a couple professors, especially on the psychology department.

DS- But on the other hand, there were some advisors that were not very good, there were just like yes, you know go ahead and transfer to a private University, which is, which would be fine, but I.

DS- I didn't have the means to go to a private University um

DS- But I did

DS- I did the transfer application and I got in and every single university I applied, but I remember like.

DS- An Advisor telling me no just apply to the university, you want to go to you'll get in, but I just didn't believe I didn't believe it would get in and I applied to every single University of California and I got into every single one um

DS- But no, I chose.

DS- I chose to stay in San Diego because it felt and then it started to feel like home because.

DS- It was probably around like the eighth year that it was here the ninth year so I didn't want I didn't really wanted to go through finding housing



again or dealing with isolation and solitude but i'm really glad I did because right after you know I accepted the offer the ucsd offer um

DS- The Covid restrictions started um

DS- And it would have, and it was already hard going through um

DS- going through.

DS- University over zoom living in San Diego, let alone, having to live somewhere else, or being in a different university so i'm glad I think I made the right decision.

AT- yeah I couldn't imagine, having to experience that like having to go travel to another town and then like.

AT- Having to start over

DS- and, like hey everything is.

DS- Remote

AT- yeah.

AT- So, can you tell me your major and also like what were the positive and negative um experiences that you had during your time at ucsd.

DS- I'm sorry, would you please repeat the question.

AT- So, can you tell me what you're majoring in at ucsd and what are the positive and negative experiences that you had during your time at ucsd if?

DS- I'm graduating.

DS- In developmental psychology.

DS- The challenges, theres so many challenges um

DS- I'd say the number one thing what's good it's being in San Diego being in a place that um

DS- I feel familiar.

DS- and

DS- I have a now made friends and feel feel somewhat safe, I think the challenges for sure is being a transfer student and not you know.

DS- Not having any friends or not having not having any connections, so I kind of feel like we come in here as a third year student and you kind of really have to rush.

DS- Through it, and understand like what classes, should I pick or what professors, should I pick I if I had come to the to UCSD from the very the very beginning, I feel like I would have been much more advanced by by year three um

DS- And the fact that you're supposed to be applying to Grad schools, by year three if you plan on not taking a gap year, I think that that was the issue is just too rushed and there's not enough advising or enough empathetic advising um

DS- And, of course, like everybody else, the fact that we had to.

DS- Take classes via zoom with very little interaction, I am an extrovert so for me was really, really difficult.

DS- Not having that.

DS- more meaningful more interactive learning experience.

AT- Well Danielle Thank you so much.

AT- For sharing that um

AT- I know how difficult it is to be a transfer student I'm one myself and and yeah like I understand the challenges that that people experience once once they transfer there um

AT- I know you mentioned earlier that when you were a Community college, that you were in clubs, are there any clubs or organizations that you're involving yourself currently right now at ucsc or during your time there?

DS- Um right now um unfortunately I didn't have the chance to really join the psychology honor club here at UCSD

DS- Because there the times that they meet we're not really um in line with the times that I had available but i'm still connected with the.

DS- The club's at Mesa college and i'm actually collaborating with a lot of like their content and doing a lot of like advising.

DS- For students who are transferring so it's kind of nice because I get to give to give back a bit and stay connected with the professors that helped me so much then um

DS- But I am involved in the lab i'm a currently I work as a I currently work as a research assistant at a social cognition lab.

DS- When inside of the the psychology department and that's kind of became some somewhat my club in San Diego because we have you know other lab partners other lab members members that we got we get to become friends with um

AT- Wow.

DS- And you know I make friends, through my classes to like the class that taking the oral history class.

DS- It was also a great way to stay connected and work in the Community, as well as with other students.

AT- Perfect perfect, thank you for sharing that yeah it's nice involving yourself in different clubs, so that that way, you can expand your network.

AT- it's always nice to meet new people okay um so I just you know wanted to talk a little bit about your goals and and you know how you see yourself in the future, do you plan on staying here in San Diego or are you going to move back to Brazil?

AT- After you graduate.

DS- Well that's that's a question I asked myself every single day, and I think every single immigrant always had you know we all have that in the back of our heads um

DS- I do see myself going back home for sure.

DS- But I also do see myself living here forever, so I don't have a definite answer.

DS- And I do get to go over to celebrate holidays.

DS- Or when if there's ever an emergency, I know i'm able to go back and forth and.

DS- That's already a i'm already fortunate to be able to do that.

DS- But it's it's hard to think long term.

DS- When there's so much already because it's been so long since I've moved to San Diego I already also feel, I will be giving up a lot, the same way that I gave up a lot, but when he moved here so it's it's part of it, my heart is always going to be half there and half here, so I just.

DS- I got used to it um when it comes to my career and what I wanted to do, yes, I want to continue working in developmental psychology and become a child psychologist.

DS- I want to do cross cultural research kind of just understanding the difference and similarities and how kids grow and develop in Brazil versus how they grow and develop here in the us.

DS- I think doing cross cultural research is a great way to connect.

DS- Both of my worlds.

AT- Yeah no that's that's great I mean it's understandable, I, like, I understand that.

AT- You know people want like everyone misses their home and where they're from and but it's nice that you like have this drive like you're like no like I want to be here, you know, like I miss home, but you know, this is also home for me so.

DS- Exactly

AT- That's understandable well Daniela I just wanted to say thank you so much for doing this uh your stories very inspirational and

AT- I just wanted to know is there anything else you would like to add to conclude our interview.

DS- Well, first of all thank you for for choosing me to to do this, I think it's a good exercise to look back at the things that I have done and.

DS- See perhaps or things that I have regretted, but things that i'm proud of.

DS- And, more than anything, I tried to just.

DS- Be grateful that I had the opportunity that I had coming from where I come from, and I hope to be able to go back and.

DS- And show that to other people just to.

DS- Motivate others as well.

DS- And I think that's it I don't think I have anything else to add.

AT- Perfect perfect okay well thank you so much for sharing your story, I really appreciate it and yeah.

AT- Thank you again.

DS- you're welcome.

AT- Okay, and this concludes my interview with daniella thank you so much, again, and this is the date is June 3 2022 Thank you.

