Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Eduardo Aguilar

Interviewer: Brandon Hill

Transcribed by: Brandon Hill

Location: Zoom

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Length of Interview: 37:00

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0:00	EA: I was born and raised until 11 years old in a place called Rioverde, San Luis Potosi in Mexico.
0:10	BH: Okay
0:11	EA: And my parents brought me to the United States when I was 11, and we settled in Encinitas. That is my second home. And from Encinitas, closer to my time of graduating high school, my family moved to Oceanside. And that's how I ended up in MiraCosta.
0:32	BH: Okay, so MiraCosta was yourthe first school you went to?
0:37	EA: MiraCosta was my community college after high school.
0:41	BH: Okay, okay, so what was your kind of whole educational experience like in MiraCosta and and moving forward?
0:49	EA: So II attended and graduated in 1998 from San Dieguito Academy in Encinitas. My family moved to Oceanside in 1997. I was in my senior year. I graduated, and then II went to MiraCosta from 1998 to 2002. I started like any other high school graduate. First generation; first one in my family to go to college; learning the ropes, learning the system; applied and qualified for financial aid. I right away got involved with M.E.Ch.A. at MiraCosta. I was an active member for the four years that I was there. In my last two years from 2000 to 2002, I was elected to be Chair of M.E.Ch.A. de MiraCosta for those two years. I can recall thebeing involved with that. I was also involved in ASG as a senator in my last 2 years, so I was very much involved as a student activist, if you will.

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2:04	EA: I was also—I joined my last two years Puente, The Puente Program. So I was also part of The Puente Program. It was somewhat hard for me, so I did not finish with the whole cohort, but I was part of the program for what—for some time. It's very—That program is very helpful, but the expectations are really high, and I was—being that first generation, English being my second language, I had a hard tie. But I'm grateful that I was part of the program. I was also part of the Soccer Club. I always—I played soccer in high school, and I continue to play soccer at MiraCosta. And I got enrolled in like my first years, there was a soccer class, and I—we used to play soccer during that time, that first two years. Well, actually, the four years every Friday, we used to get together at the—at the field, the one by the gym. And then the one—the big, the new one, well not the new one, it's been there the whole time, but they just fixed it. And we used to play soccer there all the time. I got to know my professors that way too, because some of the professors used to play with us. One of them was, may he rest in peace, Francisco Alvarez. He was a Spanish teacher. He passed about 6, 7 years ago. Academically, I spent four years there, and the reason for that was because I had to retake some classes specifically in English and math. But eventually I was able to qualify to transfer. I signed the IGETC to transfer to UC Riverside, and part of the reason why I did that is, during the time that I was involved with M.E.Ch.A. de MiraCosta, we had a conference called the Cinco de Mayo Conference and this Cinco de Mayo Conference was a conference that was to be political, critical, and we did a lot of political education. We invited community organizations and also very strong speakers to the space. One of the speakers we invited was—I think it was the last Cinco de Mayo Conference that happened in May of 2022—2022, no 2002 sorry. 2002. Was Dr. Armando Navarro. Armando Navarro was a—Dr. Armando Navarro, he may rest in peace. He passed
5:29	BH: Ha ha ha
5:30	EA: Yeah, because Dr. Armando Navarro referred to white supremacists, administrators, and people that discriminated against other people and used the system to do so as white devils. And Dick Robertson took that very personal for some reason, I don't know why.

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5:53	BH: Ha ha
5:54	EA: So I remember having conversations a little bit later where he actually shared that, and that's what I'mhe shared that in an open space where we were having some open, like town hall, you know about experiences. And he talked about that time, and I know that's how I know he got offended. I'm also already faculty by this time, part-time faculty. So because Armando Navarro came to speak, again he was a professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Riverside. And that's part of the reason why I ended up transferring to UC Riverside and majoring in one of my majors, one of my BA's is in Chicano/Chicana studies because of that. And I took some classes with him when I was at UC Riverside.
6:35	EA: While I was a student at MiraCosta, I feel very supported. I feel supported, but Ihaving mentors was extremely important to me. Having great counselors, Hilda Gomez was one of my counselors, she still works there right now. I was part of the EOPS Program too, and through the EOPS program, I wasI was able to get a job with them as a peer advisor towards the end of my time there. They help me out a lot. I took many history courses, I was pretty close to getting an AA in history, but I wanted to transfer so I didn't do that. But some of the courses in history that I took, that I ended up teaching are History 141 and 142, and I took those with Professor Arturo Arevalos who still teaches part-time, and eventually I got to teach it for some time, for more than a decade myself.
7:38	BH: Wow
7:39	EA: That's part of my experience. I don't know if you wanted that much information.
7:42	BH: Oh no, that was great. IYeah. Back to kind of when you first started at MiraCosta, what kind of inspired you, or what made you want to join these activist groups?
7:56	EA: I was a teenager in the 1990s, so I recall being in–[cough] Excuse meI recall being in middle school in 1994. This is right after Imy family brought me from Mexico and we crossed the border with our documents under the fence, and all of that. That is happening in '92. I remember in 1994, there was this big anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, anti-undocumented sentiment and a proposition that was passing, California proposition 187, which would makewould have made undocumented people ineligible to receive education, public education, and public health access, and also it would require people in public education and in the healthcare, in healthcare industry to report people without documents. So I remember in middle school, being one of the people that actually walked out of

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	school in 1994. At that age I wasI was probably like 14, 15. So I was already conscious about, you know, things that were happening.
9:18	BH: Right, yeah.
9:19	EA: Then you get into 1998, proposition 227: the end of bilingual education. And I remember these things, and I also remember my experience coming to the U.S. and experiencing xenophobia, experiencing anti-Mexican and white supremacist activist attitudes, not only by my fellow students in middle school and high school, but also by administrators. I remember in high school, I went to La Costa Canyon High School for a year, and I was the guy that would be wearing a shirt that said Brown Pride, you know.
9:50	BH: Mhm
9:51	EA: That was me, but I was like bullheaded, and you know I was in a whole different likeI was in my Dickies. But I was showing my cultural pride, and I remember theone of the vice principals at La Costa Canyon High School telling me that I could not wear those shirts anymore because they show racial racism and racial supremacy. And I tried to explain to him that it is not the same thing to wear the brown pride or black pride or black power than to, you know, white power of anything like that. It's a whole different context.
10:21	BH: Yes
10:22	EA: And Iand I was a high school student back then, trying to educate
10:25	BH: So you were cognizant of it back then and mentally aware.
10:29	EA: So I got involved in M.E.Ch.A. when I was in high school, so by the time I got to MiraCosta, I wasI had already experienced some of these things, historical things, and I was ready to engage. And that's what got me to, to eventually getto get really involved in M.E.Ch.A. Like I said, as I said, the first two years as a active participant, but in the last two years I was the Chair for M.E.Ch.A. for those two years, those last two years. And yeah, willing to take chances, and the people that remember me at MiraCosta as a student, like she retired recently too: Del Silverman, Hilda Gomez, Jose Jara. There's other people that retire too. Lomaly, Professor Lomaly, Francisco Alvarez. All these people, they remember me as a troublemaker, and I'm sure I gave Dick Robertson some headaches too, 'cause he used to call me to his office sometimes, and tried to lecture me at things, and I was like, well, I know you don't like what I'm doing, but somebody needs to question things, and he was a military man, so he expected me to like, you know abide and be very-

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11:52	BH: Yeah, be obedient to him, and yeah.
11:54	EA: Yeah. So I think that's what got me to be that way and be active.
12:02	BH: For some of our listeners when they listen back, can you provide like kind of an overview of M.E.Ch.A.'s mission and objectives. Kind of while you were there.
12:13	Yeah, well I, oh I cannot separate M.E.Ch.A. de MiraCosta with its very foundation as an organization. So M.E.Ch.A. was founded in 19there's different dates '68, 1969. At a conference, there was this conference that took place at UC Santa Barbara, and at UC Santa Barbara there was the drafting of a document called Plan de Santa Barbara, and Plan de Santa Barbara is what created the field of Chicano/Chicana studies and also help create the organization of M.E.Ch.A. Many organizations came together, like the United Mexican American students and many others and they decided to drop their names and come up with a new name that would unite all of these people with the movement that was happening at that time, which is the Civil Rights movement, and the Chicano movement. So that document for Chicano/Chicana studies and the foundational document for Chicano/Chicana studies and the foundational document for Chicano/Chicana studies and the foundational document for the foundation of M.E.Ch.A., and M.E.Ch.A. is not a club. It's a civil rights organization, and that's one thing that a lot of people do not understand. They call it a club because it's funded by club money through ASG. But it's actually an organization, a political, historical, civil rights organization. There was another document that was also founded around those years at another conference; the Chicano Youth Conference which happened in Denver, Colorado, and they develop another document there called the Plan, it's called El Plan de Aztlan. And this is a document that talks about who Chicanos are, what Chicanos stand for, and what Chicanos need to do, to demand their—their place in American society. And then at the UCSB conference in UC Santa Barbara, they also develop something called the philosophy of M.E.Ch.A., which is the basis of what M.E.Ch.A. is. So M.E.Ch.A., my understanding is an organization that is connected to the civil rights movement and is meant to exist to a—to have a space for Mexican-American Chicano students and today Latinx student

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	BSU and ASG to workto have Building 3200 be done. According to some of the notes that I have, it was ain 1985 to 1986, when MiraCosta College, they realized that they needed to build a student center cause the student center that is there today was not there. They didthey wanted a space—
16:00	BH: Really, okay.
16:01	EA: Students only and that whole building is supposed to be for students, so students engage in a surveyin conducting surveys to get more people involved. And by 1986 they determined, the college and the students that were involved in this, that it would cost about 6 million dollars to build athat's nothing today, but back then it was a lot of moneyto build this building, the 3200 building. And then by 1987, MiraCosta College students with a survey and all the signatures they collected, and this is something that was done together with ASG. One of theone of the student senators from ASG that did this, let me see if I have his name here, as I did some of this research with some of my students. The Student Senator William Craven introducedlet me see.—MiraCosta College students. Student Senator William Craven introduced SB 135 in 1987. So a student from MiraCosta College was involved in thisin the, in the Associated Student Government communicated with the Senator from the State, and they passed the bill in 1987 to put money aside or find ways to fund students and student centers, and this was started at MiraCosta. Eventually, in May 30 at night to June 3, 1988, the student election happened and by April 28, the Board approved a student center fee at the Oceanside campus effective in the Fall of 1988. And this was tothe student center fee was to pay for this building. And for a long time, those of us that went to school in 1988—I don't know if the students still pay for this fee. I don't think they do anymore, but we pay for it, and that was part of our fees. So eventually, 1988 to 1990, students in the college and college administrators came together to decide what this space would look like, and BSU and M.E.Ch.A. and ASG came together, and they got involved, and they're the ones that ended up having a big say on these spaces, and that's the reason why today you have buildings, not buildingsconference rooms at MiraCosta College named after Chicano concepts, right? Like Aztlan A and Aztlan B, which
18:58	BH: Wow! Okay.
18:59	EA: There's all that history right, and then the other thing that happened too is black students also got to have a lot of their art being displayed in a lot of these rooms, and you can still see that today. Another thing that happened is that there was supposed to be a space dedicated to these two groups because of this history and the history that they're connected to the Civil Rights Movement. Another

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	studentthe student club room, so initially the student club room was supposed to be only for these two groups, because again, their job is historically connected to the Civil Rights Movement. And they're also creating these spaces for students that were under-represented. And I see they're still under-represented today, but the numbers have changed a lot, right.
19:39	BH: Yeah, yeah
19:40	EA: HSI and all that stuff. Very recently- 2018, 2019- there were meetings that happened in the summerin the summer of 2018 where negotiations happened between administrators at MiraCosta college, M.E.Ch.A., BSU, and ASG, where they discussed a lot of these historical issues. And that's how I know this, because I work with my students
20:05	BH: Right
20:05	EA: [continued from last] to come up with a lot of this history. And you can find this history actually on ait should be at the MiraCosta College website.
20:12	BH: This isthat's quite the history. I mean, there'sthere's a lot of history in MiraCosta, and yeah, it's fascinating stuff.
20:20	EA: So I willI have been, not anymore, but I was the M.E.Ch.A. de MiraCosta faculty advisor from 2007 when I started teaching there to 2019. So for that, I was able toa lot of the things I'm sharing with you about the history and you know, the documents. I always try to educate the students so they could have a continuity with this history. So 2019 was my last time that I was the advisor, or one of the co-advisors for the group.
20:54	BH:Wow!
20:57	EA: I'm still in contact with some of the older chairs and more active members that got involved with all of this history.
21:06	BH: That's good, you're able to pass along kind of that knowledge and the culture of M.E.Ch.A. to younger generations. Kind of going back toyou mentioned the faculty administrators and white supremacy groups. Kind ofwhat arewhat were some other hurdles and challenges you guys faced back when you were a student.
21:28	EA: Personally, or in the college?
21:32	BH: Both, both

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21:33	EA: Well, personally, academically I needed to, you know, work harder and also balance my time as a student versus being an activist. So, and that's one thing that most members of these organizations have to do. Many faculty and administrators and staff from the college are very understanding and supportive of these things. But then there's some people that are not like that. They're like, "No, you're a student first, and you gotta do this first." So some people don't understand the passion of these students at the college. I think that the college is doing a lot better today. But I would say back in thein the time that I was there, there was a lot ofa lot of training that was needed on equity, on diversity and inclusion and cultural sensitivity. Not only on the faculty, but also on the administrators and the staff, because sometimes when you came to like financial aid, or you came into the cashier's office right, all of these spaces. A lot of those people were not really in tune with ourwhere the students were coming from, and
22:44	BH: Right, their circumstances.
22:45	EA: There's language barriers, there is ayou know, all the things that we talk about today like people being homeless, you know and having, you know, issues with all kinds of issues that people have today. Especially COVID, right? People were not aware of those things, and they were very insensitive and Iand I experienced some of those things myself, and I also share those things. So, for example, I canI can tell you that while I was not a student, but a professor there, I remember one of my students sharing with me that, and I took this class too, I took an oceanography class; so when you take oceanography at MiraCosta, I don't know if all the classes, but the class that I took and the class that this student took years later, one of the things that is required of you is to go to Dana Point, and in Dana Point, you get on a boat and then you go on an excursion, and then you do things in the boat that are related to oceanography.
23:38	BH: Right.
23:39	EA: It's a great experience, but you're a student that is undocumented.
23:43	BH: Mmm
23:44	EA: That means you have to drive, or you have to get a ride, and you have to pass through San Clemente and San Clemente border control checkpoint. The professor that this student had, this is my earlier years when I was teaching at MiraCosta, this is like between 2000, like around 2010. The student shared with me that the professor didn't understand that if she made the trip, it could be the end of her, because she would get deported, right?

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24:10	BH: Yeah.
24:11	EA: So I had to go talk to the professor, but tell herI first told her I had to talk to the professor about this, and then I talked to the professor myself, and you know, things like that. And when you come into contact with people in different ways, for example, financial aid, which is, if you're undocumented, you don't have access to at that point.
24:27	BH: Yeah
24:28	EA: When you get to the cashier's office, you have to pay out of pocket, and you have to pay out of state tuition because you're not a resident legally, right? So a lot of those things have changed because of this. You know, the differentthe Dream Act and there's a whole bunch of bills that have passed, but back then this was some of the issues the students were facing. And some of the people that are the administrators like this person that I've mentioned a few times, he was very insensitive and very ignorant about the student population that he was serving. He lived in his own little bubble in his world, and he thought everybody functioned his way. But that doesn't happen that way.
25:06	BH: Yes
25:07	EA: I remember being in ain a hiring committee as a student. And that's another thing that I don't see anymore. We were very active, but as a M.E.Ch.A. Chair, I was able to be in thein a hiring committee for the student center director, and I was in that group with this same person. And I remember this person saying, I live in Carlsbad, and in Carlsbad, I see so much diversity walking by the beach. And I was like I don't know what world you live in, but
25:38	BH: Yeah, [chuckle]
25:39	EA: Things like that, right?
25:40	BH: Right, right.
25:42	EA: These are like the insensitive and ignorant comments that people make in leadership positions. MiraCosta has changed so much since then, and they're makingthey have made a lot of efforts. And they have made a lot of changes, and things are very different today. But back then, this is how it is. And some of these people were very much not in tune with what was going on.
26:02	BH: Right, right.

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26:05	EA: Yeah, so I was in that committee to hire Jim Gonzalez, may he rest in peace too. He was a friend of mine too. He was the person in charge of the student centerstudent activity center in the 3200 building, and he passed also many years back. But he was more in tune with those things, and you know, I was part of that selection for him as a student.
26:33	BH: Okay, as you moved from like a student to faculty to being like an advisor for M.E.Ch.A., what did youdid you notice similar qualities in thein the kids throughout your years? Did you see them likesee them kind of as yourself?
26:52	EA: I think, the qualities remained, they're not the same as me, but they're very similar. North County is a very unique place. We are surrounded by many different, you know, diverse populations. So on one end we have the military base right, all the families and veterans, and all of that. At the other end, we have Native American reservations.
27:23	BH: Yes
27:24	EA: We go from having a very, like working class people to extremely wealthy people in communities. And we see these disparities all across the area that we are part of—the people that come to MiraCosta College, or the district of MiraCosta College has a mixture of all of these people. And we come into contact, and a lot of the—at least the time that I was a student and a lot of the students that came in—there weren't a lot of—were still experiencing some of the similar things that I experienced as a student, and those experiences do not begin at the time at MiraCosta, and they do not end at the time that we finish MiraCosta. They actually come back, they go back all the way to like middle school. So the stories that I share with the students in M.E.Ch.A., and by the way I taught Mexican-American history at MiraCosta College as I told you from the spring of 2007 to the fall of 2022. So from—I was getting all those students that were passionate, and a lot of them were part of M.E.Ch.A So the stories that we share in the classroom, and the stories that we share were very similar, you know, about being in middle school and being—getting into trouble, being like, you know, like escape goated or having to, you know, like their parents have 2 jobs and having to work a lot and not having even a lot of time. You know, a lot of them having a background in you know, with our families working in farm labor or you know, having to pay a lot of money for rent, or having to help their parents as males, gender roles.
29:10	BH: Right.
29:10	EA: So there's a lot of things that are very similar, that racism that they experience, for a while, it was veryvery similar to mine. Things have changed like I said in 2024 today. For example, my son goes to a middle school in Vista and in their

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	back to school night, they have some of the teenagers that go to the school, there was some of the students playing with guitars and singing, you know Mexican tunes. I never had that in middle school. I wasn't even sure if I wanted to go to school dances because I didn't see myself represented, but now it's cool to be Mexican, right?
29:50	BH: Yeah
29:51	EA: You go to somelike I was talking to my son yesterday, here where I live by Vista High School, there's a Stater Brothers, and it's still very traditional. But if you go to the Stater Brothers over by North River Road in Oceanside, they sell fruta picada, right. They sell things that you find like in Northgate, or in a Mexican Latino market. So you see those changes happening in some places, and a lot of my students, my most recent students, they grew up in a different place, so it's a little bit different. But my earlier students, I would say, like right before COVID, were very similar to my story. At least a lot of them, not all of them, but because some of them also were third, second, third or fourth generation also. Yeah.
30:44	BH: What would youwhat would you say your hope is, for like your son and your students now? Kind of your hope for them as they're moving into society, and where do you kind of see these relationships going with not just M.E.Ch.A., but just Mexican kind of relationships in America?
31:07	EA: Yeah, I just hope that Latinx students and and students like myself, that they get tolike their stories become like the standard of success, like the standards of succeeding. Succeeding in college and life, become standards and not the exception.
31:31	BH: Right.
31:32	EA: In my stories and a lot of the stories, a lot of the colleagues that I work with today are the exception in the system. And I hope that one day we become the standard, and and not only yes, become the standard, but we also do it with consciousness, cultural and social justice. And, and you know it's like humanity and empathy and having consciousness so that we can, you know make, you know the necessary changes and improvements to these systems, so that students feel more and more at home. And I'd like
32:08	BH: Right.
32:09	EA: MiraCosta College has gone a long way from what they were before, and I'm very happy to have seen that. I always dream of, for example, MiraCosta College

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	having a Mariachi in their graduation, Latino graduation. I got to see that already in the past few years.
32:26	BH: Yeah.
32:27	EA: I dream of a MiraCosta College having live Mexican music like an Otello and some Cumbia, and some Mexican Sinaloense in Banda. And they did that already like this, like you know, Cinco de Mayo they did something like that. So I see a lot of that stuff happening. I see that many of the department, well not many, but some of the departments at MiraCosta have changed, and they have intentionally recluded people, how they represent the population
32:55	BH: Right.
32:56	EA: You know, ethnic studies is finally being implemented recently. I'm very grateful for Olivia, Professor Olivia Quintanilla is there, and that department is extending and it is a beautiful thing to see. I graduated in 2007 from UCLA and coming back to MiraCosta, I wasn't fired. I was ready to move and shake the place up, but MiraCosta wasn't ready then.
33:22	BH: Yup, yup.
33:23	EA: In 2010, we face SB 1070 in Arizona, and then in those years there werethere was a lot ofthere was a lot of checkpoints happening all over North County and in the cities of Oceanside, Vista, Escondido, they were stealing, legally stealing cars from working class people that we didn't documents.
33:45	BH: Oh wow.
33:46	EA: And like in Escondido, they were taking these cars and keeping them in the impound for, you know, for five days, instead of just letting them go the next day, and that was just to make money. So weone of the things that happened in one of my classes was the creation of an organization in 2010, it's called a Human Rights Council of Oceanside. And this was something that was created by students. It started as a student organization and eventually became a grassroots community organization, and they still exist today. So this organization has been around for tenfor more than 10 years, and it's still active. And it's still very much a result of those years. So the activism that was necessary back whenback in those years.
34:38	BH: Interesting. Yeah, this is remarkable. Hearing your story and everything you're about, and what you're passing along to your kids and your your students is just

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	remarkable. I'mI'm just about all out of questions. Is there anything else you want to say or
35:00	EA: No, I just wanted to ask you, so I believe you sent me a link to the page where all the stories are plugged in there, so that's what gonna happen with this story, right?
35:12	BH: Yes, yes. So where you saw their pictures, we're gonna put your picture. And then when you click on it, you can see yourthis recording and the transcript of this. So yep, that's what's gonna happen. Alright, well.
35:26	EA: But thank you for including me.
35:28	BH: No, thank you for your time. This was, yeah. This was amazing. Thank you.
35:31	EA: And and one more thing, who's funding this? Or how's this being funded because I didn't have time to read it.
35:38	BH: This class at UCSD was founded 7 or 8 years ago. And so there's three different teachers, and they're connected with a couple of librarians at UCSD library. And so together, they've kind of built this oral history foundation and and the website where you can see all of them, and and through this organization, we have different community partners, and so this quarter one of the community partners was MiraCosta with Olivia Quintanilla, and a couple other ones are like the BLCI in El Cajon and a couple ofChula Vista is another location, I think. And other students are organized with the Raza Resource Centro at UCSD, and so together, we're kind of wanting to get these people together and just tell these stories.
36:36	EA: Alright, when when this is done, would you be kind to send me a link again, so I can
36:42	BH: Yes, I will.
36:43	EA: I forget, I have a lot of thingsI'm about to finish my doctorate too, so I gotta be focused.
36:49	BH: Congratulations. Yep, I willI will send you the link.
36:54	EA: Thank you. I appreciate it, Brandon.
36:56	BH: Alright, thank you very much. Bye bye.