Sol Suda-Gonzales: Hi, my name is Sol Suda-Gonzales. Today is May 23rd, 2024, and I'm interviewing Edward Pohlert through Zoom for University of California's San Diego Race and Oral History Project. Do you agree to grant the university permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Edward Pohlert: Yes, I do.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Perfect. Thank you so much. To begin, can you introduce yourself to me?

Edward Pohlert: My name is Edward Pohlert. I'm a first-generation college graduate and immigrant. I'll stop there. Yeah. Are these going to be questions that I need to elaborate on or is this kind of the pre-lim?

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, so I kind of made it so that you can just elaborate on a little bit. I can add follow-up questions to whatever you're more comfortable with.

Edward Pohlert: I would introduce me differently if it's just ad-libbed. Yeah.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No, totally. Go ahead.

Edward Pohlert: You can help me do it. I thought you were doing the due diligence. You know, like just get his name right there.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No, you can absolutely dive into it.

Edward Pohlert: Okay, then let me introduce myself. I'm Edward Pohlert. I'm a first-generation college immigrant. I was born in Amsterdam. My parents are war survivors. My father is from Indonesia, Indonesian blood, and my mother is from Amsterdam, from Holland. And they both survived war in the 40s, and I'm a product of that. So a father of two grown young men, and I've been married to my partner for life, Alma, who I've been married to for 33 years and no-nursants 35 years.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Wow, beautiful. Congratulations!

Edward Pohlert: Thank you.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: How long have you been living in California now?

Edward Pohlert: I arrived as an immigrant in 1966 with a family, and I've been in LA for about 30 years and then moved to Hawaii and came back and settled in San Diego, and I've been here

for the last, wow, since 1989, whatever that is. But my roots are in LA, and I'm still an LA guy, an LA boy.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, no, totally. Does your family still live in California?

Edward Pohlert: My mom lives in LA with her cats. She's 95. She's still going. One is in Arizona. I have a younger brother in Arizona and an older brother in Calabasas.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Beautiful. How would you describe your experience immigrating from Amsterdam to California, especially with your family?

Edward Pohlert: It's been shocking. It was shocking at the time. It was a language that I was familiar with because in Amsterdam in the school system, they teach you three languages. It's Dutch, English, and then some other language, which could be French. It could be a variety of different languages. And so coming this way was, I'll never forget this. We took a train from New York as we came on a boat, like that whole scene that everybody talks about. I guess I was in that scene. I was eight years old. And then we took a train to my, to a relatives house in Michigan. And where you sleep on the train and they gave us breakfast, but it was a box. And I go, I asked my mom at eight years old, I said, what's that? I'm hungry. And I go, what's that? And she goes, eat it. You know, like it was, but it was a bag. It was a little box of corn flakes. And I'll never forget it because it was like, that's it. Because in Holland, you don't eat that in Indonesia, you eat rice and it's like you eat full meals for breakfast. And it was this little box of corn flakes. And that was my welcome to America. And I was like, wow.

Sol Suda-Gonzales Wow. Crazy experience.

Edward Pohlert: I was a little bit like puzzled, you know. And so anyway, we, we stayed with, with some relatives. Then we went to Santa Cruz within an uncle of mine. And it's where I had the first tortilla I ever eaten. And you might find this humorous. But they were making tortillas and then they put butter on it. And then they put something else on it. It wasn't salsa, but it was ketchup. So my, my introduction was a tortilla with ketchup and butter on it. And to this day, I'll make one for myself and my wife will look at me and say, you're crazy. Because, you know, she's making me, she's from TJ or families from Sonora. And it's like, how dare you put ketchup on a tortilla? But I still like the flavor because it's.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, it totally brings back memories too, I'm sure.

Edward Pohlert: It does. So anyway, so those were, you know, through foods, it was kind of an introduction, right? But then we settled in LA and, and basically, I started, you know, as an eight year old, I was moved to fourth grade from third grade because my education was, I guess,

higher in Amsterdam. So I was a young fourth grader. And that was interesting because I was always the younger one in class. I graduated from high school at 17. But between elementary school arriving in, in the United States and then also, you know, I, I heard all these languages, you know, I heard English, but I also read Spanish and accessibility shortcuts.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: So sorry, keep going.

Edward Pohlert: Interloper. We're being hacked. I have to say that. So I lived in Argentina when I was two years old. My, my mom and dad, they moved to Argentina because there were jobs there from, from Amsterdam. And so my dad started a tool and dye business. And so he did that for 10 years, but my mom would go back because she got homesick and they spoke five languages, both of them. So they spoke Spanish, they spoke Dutch, they spoke English. They already had languages, you know, as that they perfected. And so I was born on one of those trips back to Amsterdam, but then at two years old, I went back to Argentina or I went to Argentina because she went back to, you know, because it husband, my dad. And so I stayed there from two to four years old. And so that what do you do during that time, you're forming your language. And so Spanish was, was I heard Spanish a lot. Dutch. I didn't, I mean, I spoke Dutch at home, but we were always out in the community in Argentina. And there were a lot of Europeans, but there are also a lot of, you know, people that spoke Spanish, a different dialect, of course, and in Southern California. And so at four years old, I went back to, to Amsterdam. We all did. And then we waited for immigration for us to immigrate to the United States. And my dad applied to, for immigration, you know, to immigrate in 1963, but there was a Chinese Exclusion Act keeping a quota on all Asians coming in. And so he was not accepted to immigrate. And so that was in 1963.

And so my mom applied for immigration status for the whole family in 1966. And she did get approval because she was European and she was Dutch. And so there was definitely at the time I wasn't thinking about that, but, you know, now that I'm in a adult and understanding US politics and government, etc., that must have been devastating to my dad as, you know, the brown person not being accepted in this country and the Dutch person who was my mom, you know, being embraced and saying, yeah, you can come, you know, and all that. So, so anyway, so that was profound. But I'll stop there because you can ask follow up questions because otherwise I go into storytelling and then we're here for three hours, you know, and I do have time down for if you if you need it.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, you're more than welcome to storytell as much as you want. I would just want to ask you how do you think that all of these experiences, your travel experience, your multi-ethnic background, how would you say that that has shaped your personal identity, moving to California, moving to the United States and your understanding of race and cultural integration?

Edward Pohlert: Well, it's been profound because it defined that I I know that I've always felt that I never fully belong anywhere, but belong everywhere. And so I don't know how to explain that other than, you know, by moving in these different contexts, right, these these geopolitical, racial, sociocultural contexts such as, you know, being born in Amsterdam, going to Argentina, coming to the US, you know, because when I went back to Amsterdam, I forgot this part from Argentina. I was like the darkest and I'm not dark, but I was the darkest kid in the class in elementary school because I was four or five years old, starting elementary school in Holland. And everyone I have a picture actually that's so profound, I go, oh, wow. And I look back on that and it's like all these light kids with a teacher that was, you know, kind of a midwife looking person. And, and I was right there in my little shorts and that's like I became a Dutch boy, you know, and then four years later, I get uprooted and go to America and then it becomes, you know, corn flakes and tortillas.

You know, and so, so really that those are all moments are seminal moments that impacted me. I didn't realize how much because from eight years old till 30 years after that, I lived in LA for that time. And I was, I was in many communities, but again, never fully belong. I'd always feel like there's 10% that I don't feel right to be here in this space, or I'm not accepted in this space for, you know, however, people looked at me, they always looked at me like, what are you, you know, and they didn't have to say it, they could just look at me and I could feel that. You know, what is this guy because he speaks Spanish, but he doesn't look, he's not like, or, it was rare that I'd be in a total white crowd. If you would, right. But that did happen in San Diego when I came for grad school, I went to, I forget I went to a party with a, with a buddy of mine in Mexicano, right. We came from LA. And we were in this party and it was like this feeling came over me that was like, we don't belong here. There is no way that I fit in here. And I could pass but my friend couldn't. You know, and, and, and maybe because of my last name, right, it's always been like that because like you asked like how do you pronounce Pohlert, but I can go into Spanish mode and I can go into Indonesian mode. And so I have these three threads that run through me. I also grew up in a political environment in LA. That was part of the farm worker movement, Chicanismo. And so I was adopted into that, into that movement by friends and families. And I, I've talked about this in my dissertation actually because it's a multi-ethnic identity. And I turned, I did an auto ethnography where I turned the lens within because I live in this skin 24/7.

And I wanted to get that, that experience out to the world, right? Like, what is that like? And what are the, what are the things influencing me? And so I always say this and when I talk with students, they, they said, what are you, you know, because they're curious. And to them, it's like, like, it's not, it's not, how would I say it? I don't want to say, I don't want to use this word, but I guess it's not violent, right? When they say it, but there were some other people where they said, what are you, you know, like that with some attitude? It's like, I ain't going to tell you sucker, you know, but that also, that also gave me motivation to tell my story in a dissertation. And that's

why I'm, I'm a doctor now, right? But I never knew I could do a study like that. So anyway, I'm jumping all over the place, but you asked. And so it's like here, you know, it's always been, it was complex when I was young because I remember hanging out with the crowd, you know, I'd run with my, my set outside. I'd come home and speak Dutch outside. I'd speak Spanglish and my dad never spoke Indonesian in the house, almost like it was forbidden. And I never questioned that, but I always knew that we had rice, you know, like the food was, was it was, was Asian, right? My mom cooked real good Asian food for my dad, right? She was a very patriarchal kind of setup and they were always arguing. And I grew up in an argumentative of household. And not until later on in life did I figure that out that they were the experiment, you know, and then I started asking questions about their, their marriage and their wedding. And I saw pictures. And I remember the Dutch Jewish people on one side of the hall and then all the Indo's, which were also mixed race and also, you know, Indonesian and Indonesian and German, Indonesian and mixed, right? They were on the other side and my, my mom and dad were the experiment when they married basically. And so it's like, how's that going to work? Right? I mean, I can say that now like how did they think that was going to work? But they were brave enough to do that because they were in love. And then they come to America, which is super racialized. And that becomes then even more so and then not and then being denied admission to the country as a brown Indonesian man. And then my mom gets accepted as the European woman from Holland, you know, that's, that's sexy for America, you know, or whatever. And so that all made an impact as I grew up because I was confused about identity. But I also felt it was an equalizer and in crowds that I would hang, you know, I hung with every crowd. It could be an all Asian crowd. It could be, you know, a majority Asian, Asian Pacific Islander, you know, and I could, and that side of me would come out and say with mostly Latinx. That was my comfort zone because that was how I grew up and I heard Spanish and when I heard Spanish at eight years old in LA, it was like a chip was enacted like it just turned on again because I heard it between two and four years old. And so I learned Spanish on the street, but it was already embedded in me from the Argentina experience. And so that's why my pronunciation is solid and, you know, I sometimes wing it. You know, I took formal classes, but that's a whole different level of Spanish, right. And so for me, it was, it was odd, but it was also I always felt proud like, you know, I've got this ability, this gift to cross boundaries in a racialized America. And so I used it a lot, you know, in social settings and talking with people. Sometimes I would be the one to speak for others, right. Like when we got stopped by cops, I would be the one that spoke so that I wouldn't be the one without, I'd be the one without the maybe the Mexican accent, you know, the, the, the call, you know, and all that. And so, because that was my set and we got stopped a lot, you know, and I was, I was, I was fearful of the cops always because of that. And I didn't really put it into a social cultural context then because my brain wasn't developed like that. But I knew something was wrong. And I knew that I needed to step up into the space so that we could be so that we could maybe be safe, you know. And so I'd be, I remember being out on the, you know, on the sidewalks, spread legs, all that.

And we were scared for our life, but I always felt like I had a responsibility to speak because they wouldn't maybe suspect me because I was the lighter one, maybe I didn't have that. I just didn't have that frame. And I just never knew. And so I've always been in situations like that, whether it's professional or personal, where I'm kind of holding space in the middle. I'll tell you one story. And that is that as a professional, as a young professional, I went to college. I went to work in the Maravia housing projects in East LA, working with youth from 8 years old to like 21. And it was one of the best jobs I've ever had. And I always tell people when I talk to students now, and I present to students that's like, you know, I have my college education. I've got all my degrees, but I'm going to tell you this, the year that I worked in the housing projects in Maravia is when I got the best education because I thought I was poor, but this was just a different level. You know, in terms of, you know, 12 year old girls being pregnant, you know, kids without a dad that was on heroin, kids that were taken to Juvie Hall, and then they came back three weeks later, like nothing happened. And so for every kid in there, for every kid in the project out of 10 kids, three would make it out. And, you know, that's really low, you know, but I worked with those kids and they were beautiful. And they had so much to offer. They taught me a lot. I'll never forget in the projects where the homies that live there, right. They said, hey, they called me, they called me ahead and they said, hey, you want to go fishing. I said, I've never fished before I said we can go to the Redondo pier. Let's go. I go, all right. So I'll never forget it because they, you know, I took the van. I had a license to drive the company van so to speak, for this grant project that I worked for as the youth counselor. I went to Redondo beach fishing poles that they brought and everything. And we went right there in the, you know, with just where the low water is and all that. And we went fishing and I remember catching the first fish, like I caught the first fish amongst the homies. And they treated me like the king of fish, you know, like, like I was the king who got who caught the first fish and I never went before. But they were so beautiful and they were so loving and they were so they wanted me to participate in their activity that they would, you know, not do all the time but it was like a special activity. And so I remember those moments that I have, I have this ability as a multi ethnic person to cross boundaries and equalize the playing field because I met people where they were. I didn't impose like where I was and say, you know, hey, I'm this this. And so that really became kind of my M.O. and it still is my M.O. because I work with students now and it's like I can connect with a lot of students because I have that ability to connect with inside of me to all threads that run through me. And so the way I explain it to people is this it's like, so I grew up Chicano in LA. My mom is Dutch. My dad is Indonesian. So I have that in me too. I'm an Indo-mix or an Indo-Chicano. Right. And so the way I explain it is this it's like, imagine three faucets. And you turn the water on from all three faucets. How much percent do you have? I'm asking you.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: You have 35% from each.

Edward Pohlert: That's usually the answer I get. And what I tell everybody is if you turn the water fully on at all three faucets, isn't one faucet 100% and the next one is 100% and the next

one's 100%? Why are we saying 35? I have the ability for 300%. And so I tell everybody that the three threads that run me that run through me is Indonesian, Dutch and Chicano, not in that order, but just whenever the social context determines which faucet will be on more than the other. And so when I tell that to multiracial people, multi ethnic people, they go, Oh my God, I never thought about that because I always go, why do you have yourself up? You know, why do you go 50/50? Don't you bring all of you, yourself to the table? And so that became my that became my theory and my study. That was my study in my dissertation was that temporary identity like, like I thought Chicano identity was, you know, I thought it was going to be temporary because I grew up in the movement, but I'm not. People think I'm Mexican or I'm some sort of Latino, sometimes it's Middle Eastern, sometimes it's Italian, you know, they can't peg me, right? And so what I've told them is that, you know, it depends on the context. And so I was at a conference, a professional conference, and the conference was over and of course there was a party afterwards at somebody's suite. And I would say 90% Mexicano's or Chicano's right, were in the room. And we had like, seven guys lined up like a boomerang. And we were just, you know, having fun having, you know, having a beer and just just talking, you know, just, you know, a lot of dialogue. And then one guy started and he said, you know, well, my parents are from, from somewhere in Mexico, you know, then they said the place and all that. And so every person that was in the boomerang, so to speak, you know, I'm the last person in the boomerang. And so I'm hearing everybody say, you know, where their parents are from where they were originated from where they were born, and their their experience right and then it gets to me and and while that's happening, I'm going, what do I say do I out myself now because I don't have that experience but I'm gonna tell him where I'm from. And do I be honest or do I just bullshit on, you know? And so it's like, it comes to me and so the brother next to me says, where are you so so where were you from and where where's your parents from? I said well, Have you heard this place called Amsterdam? He goes in Mexico. I go no, and my dad's from Indonesia. I'm an Indo, I'm a Dutch Indonesian and he goes, No, he wouldn't believe it. He like he denied it. He denied my own heritage right he goes, No, no, no, no, you're, you're making your your Chicano you're you're one of us and I go well, I grew up Chicano but I'm not I mean if you're talking about heritage and you know bloodline and all that.

I go I'm Dutch Indonesian I'm an I'm an Indo-Chicano. And that said, it just came out I've never had said that before and and the guy goes, No, and he was like this like, I gotta have another beer you know like he just couldn't believe it and everybody's like looking at me like wow, I didn't know that about this guy you know that we connect so so good with so there's a moment in time and that are they are they now rejecting me after that you know there's like a risk. Or am I proud that I stood up and said this is who I am? And I can hang with you because I do that 24/7 in my own life, all the time. You know, some like the Dutch and Indonesian right out at odds with each other all the time. And that the Chicano is you know that comes in when there's a movement happening. And you know I'm an advocate, I'm an activist I'm an educational activist so is that my Chicano coming out you know and so I like to think yes because you know I was in the

movement of farm workers I met Cesar Chavez at City College in LA. And so all those moments have defined me and I used to be confused about it because it's like damn it's like you know, I'm not sure like how to introduce myself to people and, you know and then they look at me like different and they're not sure, you know, they don't know. They want to ask the question but they don't, but I could feel it you know like I'm an intuitive also so I pick up on that stuff. And so it's really been fascinating but then when I figured out that it's okay to be ambiguous and it's okay to be who I am. Let me just go with that because that's where my comfort zone is that I should never be ashamed about any of them. And I used to be ashamed about my whiteness because that white guilt comes in for all the atrocities and I was at a human relations piece, a conference in the mountains with EOPS students, and there was a human relations facilitator doing a process. And she says who would like to be my subject that want to do this activity to show you all about you know cross cultural communication etc? And nobody raised her hands from the students and so I was like, let me fill in the space right and my hand just went up. And so then she used me as a tool for this lesson plan. And she goes okay tell me who you are and it's like oh shit it's like I gotta tell her who I am. And so I told her you know I think back then I was just Dutch Indonesian because I was not. I don't know if Chicano was like no I'm gonna be like a poser or something you know I don't know. I didn't want to tell that part of the experience maybe at the time. But I said I'm Dutch-Indonesian, you know, my mom is this and that and my dad is this and that. And then she and she says how come you said the the Dutch part last and and how come you're ambivalent because she was reading my body and everything. I said well the Dutch have done some horrific things etc.

And she said let me ask you something she goes do you know your grandma? I go yes. And your mom, your mom's grandma right? And I go yeah. Do you love her? I go, I love her with all my heart. And I'm closest to her from all the sons and you know the grandchildren and stuff. And she lived overseas, right, so I didn't see her a lot but I spent a lot of time with her. And so I I basically said yeah I love her and how about your mom I go I love my mom and what she stands for she's refreshing. She tells it like it is etc. That's how Dutch people are you know and on the other hand my dad is not like that he's very humble he's you know kind of these things. He doesn't he doesn't like to ruffle any feathers you know and that's that's really kind of like the the oppressor and the oppressed right. And so I'm a colonial baby and that came out of me at that moment and she goes wow she goes that's deep and she goes but you know can you understand that you you love your Dutchness. Maybe not the political part maybe not the part that ancestors did but you love who you are right and I said I sure do and so she goes then why don't you claim it and so she said it so simple and I was like you know what she's right. I can't hide behind the cloak of guilt I have to own my whiteness and my privilege. I didn't say that then but I that was part of my study to is like. You know I put that out there in terms of you know what privileges do I have when people see me as as the polar you know the the the guy that that's cool that doesn't have any kind of. You know that doesn't have a like he's not a person of color you know he's an Italian because they're not considered a person of color right now so so I so I've used that to to

people's benefit because I'm in that that other space usually you know I used to when I was hired here at Miraccosta College. I was with deans, with VPs, you know, sitting around the room and none of them were a person of color and but I was and or I am. And I remember when I first was hired they were they were talking and they were like you know just talking policy and then they were talking about somebody brought up the Folklorica group that was coming and how. Like why are they coming you know like like with attitude and I'm going, I can't believe I'm hearing this and it's like I wanted to lash out. You know like but I knew better because I'm a new employee new faculty member. I'm on tenure review and then I go. Let me just let me just observe these clowns right because I don't know what I'm walking into but what I would do the first two years I was hired because I'd be in those spaces. I'd go to my car. I still have the little Sony recording digital recorder and I would just spit into the spit into my recorder all the all the all the anger that I had or all the you know like I can't believe that fool you know I cuss words everything it's it's still recorded.

And it's still in my car it's like amazing I still have that. Like I'm afraid to pick it up it's almost like a weapon you know like hey I'm not this you know. But I had to do that just to feel sane to be okay with it with like I'm not, you know I can't I got to let it out and I didn't know who was safe to talk to you know my first two years in the third year. Then we had some colleagues that I connected with and then I shared some stuff and they said oh yeah you know that happens here and I said it's not okay you know and and I knew it wasn't okay because I have done it. I'm not going to be doing equity work and all that but when it's firsthand like that. I started to think I'm going to be the spy in the room and I'm going to use this for good because it's like I'm going to hear some stuff. But I'm also I'm a strategist I'm in I'm an organizational thinker and so it's like let me let me take that back to the community you know basically the faculty that was that we were growing here. And so I've been an equity champion and equity practitioner for I would say for 41 years. But I mean at Miracosta I became you know I became how would I say it? I became really confident in being a code switcher a code talker basically and and then being a mentor to many so that if they're in situations then how to deal with that. And so I took up I took that on and I had to make sure that I wasn't taking it on inside my body because I would hear some stuff from faculty that was just horrific. And I said you know that's that's not okay. And so how do we first of all help heal the faculty a little bit so they can keep you know keep going in the fight so to speak. But also start a movement where we can start changing some policies and structures and check people basically because not everyone can do that. And so I became the checker you know I became like I had I had I had a hat with a lot of different roles. And one of them was like well I'm going to be the one that checks that person because I can probably get away with it because they don't suspect me.

Because I'm a mystery so they don't know what I am. I mean I had a VP tell me you know like I don't know if you know higher ed but EOPS EOPS programs EOPS programs you're familiar. Yes.

Yeah. So you know the director who was here who I knew already from a graduate program before and who was you know who's a she was a brawler she was a Chicana who was just would never take no from the admins right. And the admin that hired me right he had me in his office and he said you know I really hope you can help me. And he said these words I'll never ever forget him.

I really hope you can help me tame Teresa. I said hmm and I didn't react because I go OK well I'm not outing myself here because I could I could have went for his neck you know and cut his neck. I mean that's how like that's what was boiling in me. I said OK well you know I know I can work with her I said you know I just gave him some generic answer. And of course I want to tell us that's a hey Teresa I know you're not tameable as they want you to be but I'm going to work with you and let's work together so that we can get this fool you know on on the right side of history rather than on the wrong side. And so we did that right. And this like but but things like that were always presented. And so I always feel like I hold this middle space without choosing it. It chooses me. And so even like with this interview it's like OK. Like like Olivia like I connected with Olivia once she first was hired. And we haven't had a lot of conversations but I know that we both caught our each other's vibe you know like each other's spirit each other's corazon. And it's like and so I feel really privileged to be in this space to be to have her say you know why don't you hook up with our research project you know because it's like OK. I'm ready and I'm going to tell the truth right. I'm going to be authentic as as who I am. I'm going to stop there because I'm just talking now.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No you're totally fine.

Edward Pohlert: You've got to interrupt me because because I don't know it's like I think the original question was how has it defined you or you in America.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No I love it. It makes it more authentic. It was beautifully said by the way. Maybe to the transition a little bit talking about Olivia. What is your background in your educational experience and how have you gotten to the position that you're in now?

Edward Pohlert: So I started as, I was not a good high school student. I barely made it through because of the sports. Right. I made it because of sports. And it wasn't that I wasn't studious, I just wasn't engaged in school. It wasn't then I had an art teacher that engaged me in high school and a psychology class that I thought was really cool because we did these activities on self. Right. And so I graduated but it was a high school that I went to that I chose because we moved and it was a junior/senior high school. So you had all these Chamakos running around. You know and then you had had seniors too. You know so so I picked a school that was had had kids running around but also was the school with with really characterized as the Eagle rock high

school which was white primarily except for the athletes. Who were mixed right. And so I hung out with the athletes but I also remember being being there the first two weeks because I came from Washington Irving junior high school which was mostly Chicano. And when I got to high school I remember walking down the lawn or the you know the I don't know the the place that everybody walks through right the corridor. And I had my my Levi's cuff they were starched there. I was looking sharp right. I thought I was looking sharp but I could feel the stairs and I I right away felt like oh shit like where did I come? This is so different than junior high because that was just normal. And so it became deep. I became the other in high school real quick. And so I hung out again with with a small set of people that you know Chicano/Chicanas that were just you know we trusted each other. And we stuck together and then and then the athletes as well. And that was different because they were athletes and they came from you know different different walks of life. So so anyway so that was my experience in high school but then when it was time to graduate. Everybody was going to Glendale College as the community college and I'll never forget this somebody came to my classroom and had a financial aid application, a FAFSA, and then an admissions application. And they said if you fill this out, we accept you if you're a high school graduate or you're 18 and I was 17 and a high school graduate so I go OK check the box on that. And then if you fill this out the FAFSA. Then you can get money to go to school and that was the operative word was money right because we were poor single parent household. My mom was on welfare and all that so because they had split my mom and dad split it finally broke apart.

They realized that they were not a good match after 18 years so that's a whole other story. But but I say that all to say that the guy the rep was from LACC LA City College and I go I'm going there. I don't want to go to Glendale I don't want to continue high school I want to I want to break away from that. And so when I went to high school the first people I met were in the quad area. They were there were these there were these fellas from junior high that I knew and they were driving low riders and they were cruising with your Boulevard every Saturday. And so I got my first financial aid check I was taking two buses to community college. And finally I got my first check and and I said you know what I'm going to buy me a ride and so I bought myself a reviera they had two riviera’s s a 65 revaria and then I bought myself a 66. And it was already fixed up but it had some rust on the top I said that's all right. And so I bought it with my financial aid check so I wouldn't have to take two buses you know for two hours to get to school rather than a half hour that's how close it was. And so anyway so so that began my community college career and I wasn't like I said I wasn't a good student but I really got turned on to education because Cesar Chavez came to school. And he spoke about the farm worker movement and I'll never forget this. He spoke about farm workers and their plight and his activism. And he's a real humble man but really strong. And then afterwards you could you know get in line to just say hello. And so I got in line and I had three minutes with him you know like in line and that was my turn. And I just you know complimented him on the movement and just the information he gave was fantastic. And I said where can I sign up?And he goes and he called one of his staff

over you know it's like hey this guy wants to sign up and I took my lunch money my five dollars lunch money that I had you know from financial aid left over and I gave it to them and I've never stopped giving to the UFW. And so but that became like a seminal moment because it's like this is what college is about and then I met you know I heard Maya Angela speak, the poet, and you know she's just a fantastic person. And then Tom Hayden was Jane Fonda's wife or husband who was a politician from the 60s and he was part of 60's civil rights struggles and all that. And so that became my you know that became kind of my moment of education is pretty cool. The philosophy professor had class under the tree had long hair and jeans on and you know so it was just a different brand in high school. And then the criminal justice class that I signed up for I don't know why because I was afraid of cops the detective in there. He was showing us his gun and I was like I almost walked out because the only gun I've ever saw was pointed at me always at the you know the guys when we went out.

And so I just stayed and hung in there because I go you know I'm afraid of guns and this fool is going to take it out and I don't care if he talks about it but I learned something that day. And so it really college became this experience experiential piece. So that was my community college I got my AA degree in sociology. I transferred to Cal State LA that's when I had my job in the housing projects. And I thought my job was a lot more exciting than the philosophy class I had to go to in the lecture hall of 300 people and see this little peanut lecture to us. And so I skipped class and so I got straight D's my first two quarters. And then I finally left I said you know I got to leave and I got to just go to go to my work. So I worked for one year. They had this promotional opportunity to have to be the director of the program the grant program. And they asked me if I had my degree and I said yeah I got my AA from LACC and you know why what's up? And they said oh we thought you'd be a great director you have the skill set, you can you know talk to people and all that but you need a bachelor's degree. And you don't have it so we can't really have you in our view for the job, but you would have been perfect. And it was like I was devastated. And so at that moment I felt like, okay, education, I can't be denied a job because I don't have the Mika right. And so I stayed at the job for two more months. I quit. And then I went back to school. And that's when I started working in the affirmative action program. And that's when I became super politicized because that was during the Iranian crisis that this country had with Iran. And so IMS came to the campus immigration service and they were stopping people who had beards and they were just questioning him. And so we protested that we sat in on the president's office and all that. And then from that they stopped coming, it actually worked. And then we decided we've been in the basement. We said, you know what, we need to take over student government to forget these fraternities and sororities that have their own interests in mind. We need we got to give it back to the community. And so we want 11 out of 12 positions and a grassroots way, you know, with flyers and five points, five principal points of interest that we stand on. And I became the VP of academic governance. That means I had to chop it up with faculty. And so that's where I learned where faculty are not interested in students in the, in, you know, behind closed doors. I can't say that now, but there's a lot of those doors still. And so, you

know, I observed a lot. I didn't speak a lot, but I would give my student perspective, you know, when I saw the opportunity. But that's where I learned on how the politics on campuses works.

So, so anyway, so that was Cal State LA. Then somebody at Cal State LA said, Hey, this program in San Diego would be great for you. It's called the CBB Community Based Block Program at San Diego State Counseling Program, renowned for its activism. And so I went with a buddy and we went to visit and I'll never remember, I'll never forget this one also. We went to the after party after the class. And we were the guest visitors, right? And one of the members, one of the students came up to us and he goes, So what makes you think you're good enough for this program? And it was like a almost like, you know, like, like you're hitting me up, you know, and I forget what I said, but I guess it was okay because, you know, he goes, Oh, okay, you know, like, and I don't remember what I said, but I just remember it's like, Okay, it's that kind of program like an in your face program. And it's, you know, they, they, they have everybody from, you know, from A to Z in that program. Only 30 people that they accept. And so we were accepted to the program. We applied and all that and that changed my life because I, I learned counseling from not only a multicultural perspective, but from an authentic indigenous perspective. And so I was able to learn counseling skills through the process. So we didn't have like, like it was funny. I remember the program director said this, we have counseling skills from one to 25. We may not get through them all because we're going to go through a process. And so the first activity that you need to do is we have the five faculty here with 36 students, right? We're going to leave the room, but it's your job to pick your faculty mentor. And we can only have X amount for each faculty. And so they left the room. And then it was up to the students to pick and it was total chaos, because everybody wanted Maria Maria was the program director Maria and the Ethel senior. She's a trustee at the San Diego Community College district. And she's retired now from San Diego State, but everybody wanted her because she was the cool one and everybody else was maybe, you know, and some people pick, you know, they were, we had black, we had white, we had Chicana, we had, we didn't have an Asian faculty. But I picked an African American woman, faculty member, scholar, that rests in power. Her name was Sharon Grant Henry and she went to Princeton and came back to teach and that's this program. And she was just so beautiful and smooth in terms of how she, how she just worked with conflict and wasn't afraid to tell the truth. And so I learned a lot from her and that was my master's program.

And then she created a doctoral program at Alliant International University at the Scripps over there. That would kind of mimic the graduate program from San Diego State, the block program. But it was in somebody else's hands and so they created that I applied to that, I got in, I got a year's credit for a four year program. And for three years, I took some courses. But there were only nine students right and I remember walking into this college which was in kind of like a three story building. You know, not like a real campus. And I remember the parking lot, all these beamers were there and all these all these fancy cars and I'm going and a young set between 18 and 24. And I remember signing the admissions documents to sign up it was 17 grand per

semester. And I go that's a shitload of money, you know, it's like, and so but I'm doing it because I'm doing it on the faith and trust of a colleague that was in it before me. And so I walked out of that office, and I saw all these young ones, you know, not a lot of students of color and I'm so like, I don't belong in here. This is this is foolish, you know, why am I going to pay all this money to do what? You know, I lost sight of that program that that was supposed to be so forward thinking. And I was trying to figure out a way to go back into that office with the admissions officer and find an excuse to have her give me back the application like oh I missed something I think I need to look at it. So I could just rip it up in front of her and say, this is not a contract anymore. That's valid, you know, and I was ready to do that. But at that same time up the stairs walks my friend and colleague who was in the program already. A Philippina woman. And she walks up she goes Edward, so you signed up and everything I said, I did but I'm trying to get out of it. She spent an hour with me on the bench right there. And just talked me through it and I finally said okay, I'll do it. And that was my doctoral program in culture and human behavior and psychology. And that was one of the best programs I've ever been part of it doesn't exist anymore because it was the novel up and coming program. And then when they had budget cuts it was the, you know, the newest program and the first one cut.

And so the institution didn't commit to it basically, but I graduated and then they, you know, they grandfathered/grandmothered us in so that we could get our degree after they cut it. But I took classes from the native perspective in the res. And I can't tell you what I experienced there because it was spiritual. You know, we were getting getting taught the indigenous ways and things were happening as we were in the hall. And I can't describe it really I just know it was a spirit that was in there. And then we, we, we got the first psychology first black psychologist taught us about black psychology in San Diego. And so we, we got sitting bulls. Descendant of sitting bull was teaching us about native medicine and resilience and and living in the present. And so it was just incredible program. That was before it's time basically before all these programs. So anyway, so I got my doctorate and so, so when I got my doctorate, I'll tell you this one more story and then and then you can ask me questions or what have you or the next, the next piece. So I'm working at Miracosta College for about four years because this was 2007 I came in 2003. And I remember like, I had my masters and you know, I was in different spaces, but I wouldn't get invited to all the spaces. As soon as I got my doctorate is like, Oh, Dr. Pohlert, we'd like to hear your perspective. I could write a fucking book about how they treated me before and after so in fall and in spring and I, I journaled about that and I remember saying to myself, I go, wow, the ivory tower is real. And now that I have, you know, the title behind my name. It's even more of a responsibility on how to work that in these spaces that I'm really not accepted but because of the title they're going to give me at least an invitation in the door. And because of my last name, they're going to give me an invitation plus the title right. And so I'm not a suspect and so I take that very seriously but I take the responsibility and the weight on my shoulders because I come from people who survived war. And so that's not that's not that's no biggie. And so I've had to deal with, you know, the, the grief of people being fired, the, the grief of people being

dissed and not fully feeling whole. The grief of someone barely getting tenure, but because they didn't play by those rules, the systemic rules in that department. You know, I had to coach them right and then to overcome that it's like we have a we have a life bond now right with some of those folks that I have have been in battle with. And now it's a little better right it's it's more better, but they don't teach you these skills at the college level. They don't teach you negotiation skills or navigation skills. They don't teach you the political, like there's a lot of colleagues they'll say well I'm not political it's like hell hell no what do you mean? You being here and you being a counselor here or a faculty member in the classroom, and you being a person of color? That makes you political, because these systems weren't built for us and so we have to infiltrate, and we have to change systems and we have to hold space for students so that they can see us in our full brilliance you know.

And so, anyway, that's my education but it goes much more behind the letters behind my name. It's all the, it's all the stories attached to the struggle, but also the victories and semi victories, and then, most of all the impact that it has on communities when you see. I work with formerly incarcerated most recently last year, and for people coming out of, you know, out of the out of the prison industrial complex, and to turn their life around in two years it's like it's, I don't have a word to describe it maybe exhilarating. Maybe that's not right but you know they have a new chance at life and my brother in law was one of those students not here but he was inside for 34 years. And when he got out he got his trade tech degree and all that, but now he lives in Mexico with his love, loved one his partner, and a small town called Lagos de Moreno. And he has a new lease on life and he's 60, but he has another chance to live a different life and, you know, and a lot of it is still there in his psyche but he's purged a lot of it to through therapy through surrounding himself with lots of people. So, I'll stop there for a minute. I need a drink anyway.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: That's absolutely amazing. Yeah, Olivia was telling me a little bit about all the organizations that you're a part of on campus and off. I'd love to hear more about what you're part of, whether it's community or campus organizations and your experience in them.

Edward Pohlert: Okay, well the organizations off campus are intricately involved with on campus also because I met Chris Burrows who runs a nonprofit called Garden 31. And so he was incarcerated for 15 years. He got out. But in when he was inside he thought of his own business plan and he actually is operationalizing that now with Garden 31 which is to build gardens in communities right,he's doing it at schools right now, but also in the community. And to also then have formerly incarcerated folks who come out tend to the gardens but also work with their character development so that they can shed some of the ways that they've either learned in prison or had before and really get down to the core of who they really are. You know, so like, if it was a former gang member who was, you know, was posing trying to be tough but really this person has a lot of skill sets that just we're never explored, you know, because of circumstance and so, so Garden 31, I'm on the board of that I've been on the board for I think four years now.

And we have some really exciting projects in the community we've got a lot of grants that are, you know, supporting that we have some acres of land that we're going to develop and the goal is to have housing on that land so that when people come out. They do kind of like a, it's almost like a one year retreat, you know, where they go to live there, they cultivate the land, they work on themselves through not only counseling but character we call it character mastery. And then they, they, you know, they integrate into the community and they also get jobs, you know, so it's also attached with jobs so that's one that's garden 31. I just was at yesterday I was meeting with ethnic studies faculty and community members at Universidad Popular, which is Dr. Nunez Alvarez is the director of that. And they do a lot of work with immigrants who used to be a Cal State San Marcos, and they, she was doing some phenomenal work, but the university pushed her out. I'm just going to say that's a simple way of saying it, but there's a lot packed in there. But basically what she became one of the human relations champions at the MLK breakfast, she was honored. And she's, she's, she's known widely known. But they also have they set up tents at the, at the border camp over there where people on the other side, you know, they're being detained. And they're not in covered housing at all right, they're waiting for asylum and all that. And it's the conditions are deplorable so so she takes a group of her folks, and they feed them and they they provide supplies etc. You know for comfort and check in on them and have you know dialogue etc. So that's another organization. And then I've been part of other ones. I can't think right off the top of my head, you know, over time but those are the two, two main ones.

And then I'm also going to run for the board of trustees at Palomar College. I just decided that last week. So I'm, I had a phone call yesterday and meeting with the trade unions because you want their endorsement I guess. I'm not a politician but I am. I'm, you know, I'm connected educationally but this is a whole other world. I found out there's 22 trade unions in San Diego and they have compacts with the city of San Diego to ensure that they hire unionized labor rather than non unionized labor. And so I would love their endorsement right and so that means I got to go before them and, you know, say my thing whatever it is that they want to want me to answer, and then get the yay or nay you know and it's like I did that with Palomar's faculty union and classified professional union. Two, three weeks ago, and I was waiting to hear it was almost like this interview right it is an interview. And they said yes it's like okay well that's my calling. And it's, you know, I'm retiring from your coast next year at this time in June 2025 and so I can't just leave education because I've been, I grew up in 41 years as a professional. And so a board trustee position is not as you know intense as it is its policy and it's more you know 30,000 foot level, but star Dr. Star Rivera Lacey is the president superintendent, and she's my former student so I'm. And it's like this is the best time to do it because they also we also need to prevent all these knuckleheads running for boards of you know on on school systems etc to try and get into assembly because they're all, they're all coming from that MAGA cloths you know that MAGA mindset. And it's really dangerous. They're trying to overtake boards so they can roll us back to the 19th century. So I'm also doing it for that but then the last reason I'm doing it for is and the first really is that I really shouldn't be the one running for this board because 62% of the

population in the area that I would represent is Latin X. It's like, how come we don't have someone that's running from that could this community that's the majority? And so again I'm I'm thrust into this middle space, where if I can help build that succession planning, where I can identify younger people that have vibrancy because maybe someone like yourself might never think of oh I can be that board of trustee member. Right that's out of my reach maybe right maybe that's imposter syndrome stuff right. And it's like, no let's build a foundation so that we'll always have an area to wrap that represents this community in a progressive way. And so that's what I want to build. And so that that's the next calling. And then of course doing filmmaking, which is my love also. Documentary filmmaking so.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, I would love to hear a little bit about your filmmaking too, what does it involve?

Edward Pohlert: Well, I, you know, so, gosh how did that start I've always been a visual learner. And I've always been a real fan of people's narratives, because that's how you get to know people like beyond the curve beyond the curtain. When you really kind of listen and maybe prompt people to dig a little deeper, you know, like, well tell me more about what that means for you, you know that kind of thing. I'm a psychologist counselor by nature. And so you get just more quality information from people if they're if they feel safe and they feel it's okay to share. And so I wanted to start putting that type of dialogue on film. And so I've done a couple of documentaries here on campus and in the region for formerly incarcerated and also first generation college students that are no more than 15 minutes long and what prompted me is I used to go to NCORE a lot. I went to a national conference on race and ethnicity.

I've been 14 times and I met one of the human relations, Shakti Butler. She's well known across the nation doing workshops, etc. And I ran into her one of the conferences and I, she asked me what are you doing now, you know, and I said, Oh, I'm doing this, this and this. And I'm doing some film and she goes she wanted to know about the film part. And so I told her my motivation was Spike Lee and Uber. And what Spike Lee did was, I forget what year but many years ago if you if you Google Spike Lee and Uber, it will, it will pop up his Uber stories. And what he did is he got eight people in Brooklyn, he's from Brooklyn, New York. And he did 10 minute vignettes of each person separately. And I saw one of them and I didn't stop until I finished the eighth person in one sitting. And I couldn't stop because in 10 minutes I got to know this individual like imagine you sitting there being interviewed but then there's a lot of B roll right like like they work for Uber and delivering food or driving. And that was besides the point it wasn't even about Uber but he did something so brilliant. I go, I know this person after 10 minutes. Like I know a piece of who they are and how they're thinking and what their life has been like. I go that's brilliant I go I want to do that because nobody has time for a three hour documentary anymore. You know, let alone for 20 seconds of Tik Tok right? So, so I wanted to model that and say, you know what, I can make films like that I can make documentaries and so I did in my dissertation

do a multimedia project that's called heuristic methodology. And the risk methodology is where you use poetry narrative multimedia, where you present your study in that kind of way and so that's what I did my dissertation on. I did it that way I did I have a lot of narrative like what I was telling you about those stories with the fellas right the boomerang and all that. That's in my dissertation. And it was hard to find multi multi racial scholars that that that would tell a story it was mostly, and there weren't that many studies back in the day, you know, 2007. So anyway, you asked me about my filmmaking and so I wanted to do that and so I did a first generation, I got funding for a first gen film, a concept that I that I developed with some other folks.

And then it was in partnership with KOCT, which is a public TV station and Oceanside, and they were the filmmakers and I was like, I would get the day we do the on campus film and I would do the community film and I was always like, you know, these were two, you know, nice things. They weren't nice ladies but they weren't, they weren't really culturally proficient and so they would they said, so they put together some b-roll and they had like, Mexicano jumping the fence right, and I'm going, that can't be in there. I go you know what that that represents it's like jumping over the wall as an immigrant, you know, and I go you can't have that in there and they were saying oh okay. I guess that's a good point you know so they weren't they just weren't there you know. And so that was the first film that I did. And besides my dissertation one which is not a film it's more of like a slideshow with music and narration that I do. And I'll send I'll send you the link and all that so you can look at it also.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, I’d love that.

Edward Pohlert: Because all those films are on it. But anyway so I did that 16 minute first gen film, I presented that to the campus in our flex professional development. And now it's being used in the classroom as an educational tool. So they show that and then they have dialogue and you know, it spawns off many different topics because it's got race in there, it's got gender, it's got a reentry student who's the subject, who's 30 years old has two kids. And, and his majors auto tech so it's not your, you know your transfer students at UCSD, you know, you know, because everyone wants to focus on that person right but it's like we're Community College we're, we're in those, those other areas as well. So, it kind of breaks the norm. I think that is the norm but it puts the norm out in a different way. And I did another one for formerly incarcerated for rising scholars the statewide network. I did one for region 10, which is all the Community Colleges in San Diego County. And then I did one for on campus for our right on rising scholar transition scholars program. So I've done some work I've done some poetry to music. I've done, you know, a little bit. Most recently, my one of my homies from LA passed away from brain cancer. And I was tight with him since 14. And I asked everyone to send me pictures, you know, on a Google Doc. And if they have any video short videos and MP3 format. Then I would, I would turn around and do a memorial video and so I did something for like nine minutes. And we showed that at the reception after the after the service. And it was beautiful it's like none, you know, I put

I put old school music and I'll send that one to you too. But you know, the way I worked that one was like, I was grieving his death right. And by doing the video, I actually, it really felt good to do that, because it took me a while. I mean, it was like a 12 hour project overnight. I didn't sleep at all. But I cried, I laughed, I, you know, reminisced. And that was so healthy for me because, you know, I didn't know how to grieve him. You know, it was like he's just gone just he he declined like I had lunch with them three months ago. And he was, you know, he had to get help with the walker, but three months later he died, you know, like it was just tragic but. But anyway, so I love filmmaking I think telling a story through film beats a 300 page document that people maybe might pick up or not. And so I can tell a story in 15 minutes or less and so I started working on an autobiography of my uncle. That's the last surviving member of my dad's side, the Indonesian side. He lives in Europe or he lived in Europe. And I reconnected with him in 2018 so he used to house with the tortilla and the catch up. That's where we stayed for like, you know, three months before we moved to LA. And so I never really reconnected with him because he moved back to Europe after living in Santa Cruz for 40 years with his wife and his kids. And so they all moved back except for the son. And I reconnected with him, with my family. And then I went to visit him the following year and I just turned the little camera I have it's a, you know, the DJI camera. It's like a camera on a swivel it's like a.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Edward Pohlert: Have you seen that? And so I just, I would just, he would just start talking because I would ask him about, you know, different things about his past and stuff. And when he started talking, I just turned the camera on without him seeing it. And I just recorded so I have about 10 hours of document, documented storytelling. And I start I was starting to go back again one more time and then he died at 98 years old. And so, and what I will say about that was that when I stayed with him for by myself for four nights. Outside of Amsterdam. He was living in a flat, you know, that he had bought with his money's from here. We would say good night to each other and then every time I went he had an extra room so I was in the spare room he was in his bedroom. And every time we said good night and we go to our rooms, I heard shuffling feet. And I'm kind of what's he doing, you know, like, I thought he went to sleep, you know? And I wouldn't go out there I said, whatever, you know, maybe he's getting some drink or whatever. I don't know if he needs my help but I'm going to just go to sleep. So the last night I waited for the last night and I was just too curious it's like I was, I was killing inside of me. And so I hear the shuffle and I go around but I bring my little camera to go I don't know what I'm going to witness here. And I look around. And on the mantle is his wife's remains because she's in an urn. And he's talking to her. Every night he does that. And it was so beautiful and I, I go you know what I'm going to take this, but this is going to be for me only not this not for public consumption it's, I'm just going to keep this for my memory. Because you know he's 98 right. Or at the time he was 96 when I was that that was in 2019.

And so when he actually passed in 2021. I, you know, the family wanted me to go and I was the one from America representing the American side right. And so I went to the service and everything and I walked into the family room before the service. And the brothers, you know, saying, okay, oh great you're here. He goes, I'm going to speak first, then my sister is going to speak and then you're going to close Edward and I was like, what? It's like, okay, I knew I was going to do something that my brother had written a letter my older brother, and he didn't want to go, you know, he's that way. And so he had written a letter in English, but they understand English but the language that's in common for all of them is not Indonesian, it's Dutch, because you know they grew up in the Dutch rule. It's the oppressors language and they, they, they kept it, you know. And so that's the language and so I speak fluent Dutch. And so I read the letter right in English. And then I just put the letter aside and then I just riff, and I just go, I just adlib. And I ended with that moment that I told you about him coming out of his room and shuffling and talking to his wife and there wasn't a dry eye in the house and it was beautiful. Like I didn't know when I was going to use that visual and story, if ever. But that was the moment I had to use it. You know, it's like you don't know what's going to happen with something like that when you witness something. And that was the perfect moment for it, you know, and so I feel really blessed that that creator really runs through me in those moments because I never plan all that out. It just happens. And so I really kind of rely on my instinct, my intuition, and the great spirit that guides me and usually it's my grandmother's spirit both my grandmother's on both sides that I feel very strong about. And I feel like they're guiding me, you know. So I forgot your question but oh community, community agencies but you know, I'm a storyteller.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No, it was absolutely beautiful. It really is reminiscent of what I've been learning in this course with Professor Alvarez this quarter, oral histories and the importance of them I hadn't really been too familiar with it but it's really so important to preserve the history, especially in storytelling it's very powerful for sure.

Edward Pohlert: Yeah, and so just to follow up on my uncle's story right my goal, going from Spike Lee and being influenced that way, and then putting these little, these 15 or 16 minute videos together right for school, and for region, and for populations. And then going back to that NCORE conference because I never finished that story it was like, so she's married to a husband who's a KPBS filmmaker, award winning filmmaker, and we're standing at the bagel station at the conference and she goes, as a matter of fact, there he is now. And she calls him over. And so I told him my idea of, you know, the 15 minute documentary, and he goes that's brilliant. And this guy's an award winning filmmaker and I'm like, what, you know, like, so he gave me that, I guess, not permission but validation that that's a great idea. And so I'm really like love to do that. And then I get invited to this University of Hawaii Institute right. And it's like, it's just coming. And it's here it's presenting itself and, and then this interview it's like, okay, I'll interview you know like I'm just going to go with the flow here. Because it's so important to capture the stories and the wisdom of elders, because we don't treat elders well here in this country at all. Right,

their throwaways, go get in a home and that's it. And they're done right. Wait for you to die kind of thing and, you know, and even even now it's like you know when you get older it's like people don't appreciate that right. Like I feel that here sometimes right but, but I'm also youthful so I, again I can cross boundaries. And so who's this like when I tell people my age. Usually I have students guess my age I said, So what do you think, how old do you think I am? I don't want to do that. And they go, like, 52. I go, I'll take it. You know, I’m 66. But it's like, when I say 66 it's like, what?, like they're they're shocked but sometimes I think like young people think anything over 30s old, you know, like you're washed up or something. And so, so anyway, but, but I want to make documentaries on on 70 and above, you know, and, and, and they have a lot to say. But how do you condense that into like a 60 minute video or project, you know, but I think I can so. Yeah.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: No, that's absolutely amazing. Thank you so much for sharing all of that was very cool I'd love to be see the videos that you have for me afterwards. And then I know we've been here for a little bit so I'll just wrap it up I just want to ask you to finish off. If you could give a piece of advice to any first generation student or anybody looking to start college. What would it be?

Edward Pohlert: Use your use your narrative about being the first in your family. And then, you know, I think that's a good thing. Whether that's the struggles. You know, maybe the visibility, maybe the, I don't know if I can do this. Use that as fuel to authenticate yourself. And that that's, that's cultural wealth, that's community wealth, that's familial wealth, right, that you already have embedded in you. Now you're just going to get a vocabulary that you're learning and a new context that you can overlay that. But you already it's already in you. Like your, your greatness is already there. You just need the right fertile soil. And sometimes it's not always there you just need enough soil that has enough nutrients so that you can, you can flower and you can be great, right because you're already great, but where you can just, you know, reach your potential and so it doesn't have to be the perfect soil. You know, like, if it's all cracked and in the desert. Maybe it's not the right soil then you need to get out of there. And so I would say for first generation folks like myself. It's like, don't have any shame and struggle. You know, the struggle is what is the fuel but it's also when you can, when you can finally talk about it in a way that where you can step back from it, and maybe not analyze it but understand the roots of it and understand what you're carrying as a first-gen. Then you unleash the power that's within that story. And I think when you unleash the power that's within that. Then you can realize, you can get any title you, you can earn any title you want. But if you earn a title without that authenticity and the mountain behind you that you're carrying, then it doesn't mean the title don't mean anything. You know, and so it's like, I have that that degree, I used to have it in my office, and people would stare at it and I, and then I would pull out my a degree from LA City College. I said, right here is the most important degree that I have and you know why that's when I got turned out to

education and when I snapped, when I snapped out of, I can't be a good student, because I had professors who who were just cool and who were just like, okay, this is different.

You know, I met, I tell this as our Java story, the Maya Angelis story, and people go, oh, because people always think it's about just about the books, the notes. And, you know, yeah, you got to show up, but you have to engage in school. If you don't engage, you're just a seat. If you engage, you become a scholar, and you're a learner and then you put that learning out. And then bring someone else along. You know, if you're first gen, you have a responsibility to bring others along that are first gen. You know, and that way the cycle doesn't repeat itself because you're fighting uphill battles against work, work mentality against, you know, women shouldn't go to school, they should have babies, you know, all of that right all of that practice I can keep going there's probably a list of 100 things. You know, or the, or the fellas that grab, or the fellas and I mean that in a non genderized way right the fellas who pull you back because they think you're too smart for them right. And so you don't belong there and then in school you don't really belong either and so you're in that middle zone. And it's like so how do you deal with the middle zone? Right, where you don't fully believe you belong like I don't fully belong I still believe to this day where I'm sitting around with all these PhDs like say in science and all that, like, damn, I got I got mine in psychology, you know, like cultural psychology, you know, like, I still feel like that sometimes. But then I kind of, you know, I kind of get past that in the first 30 seconds and I say you know what, I'm here for a reason and the seat I've earned the seat. Now don't waste it. You know, become the scholar that I can be and speak from that authentic self. And so that's a, you could grab whatever it is from there as the advice. You know, because for me it's like it runs through me from my students to so it's not my advice it's from, it's what students countless times have told me. You know, like we've shared story it's a it's a it's a two way street. And so to claim it as my own is really not authentic. Right, it's just something that I've learned along the way. And I've learned more from my students and they've learned from me I think because we put all these folks on a pedestal until they fall down. And then what's left when those folks are gone yourself. And so you got to rely on yourself and your own self word and your own authenticity and your own history that you can take the strengths from it, the struggles from it, and then put that out into the world, like, you know, as as a world member, not as the expert or not as the, you know, like, are you getting your doctorate?

Sol Suda-Gonzales: I plan on it. Yeah.

Edward Pohlert: So, that's a real tough process because it's such an isolated experience and that's such a westernized white supremacist way of thinking like you're going to become the expert. And the biggest compliment I got was from Dr. Marisol Clarke Banias. When she was my chair in my study. You know, she is from Cal State San Marco. She does immigrant. She's written on immigrant immigration and undocumented students.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: Yeah, I'm not familiar but yeah, from what you've said she sounds amazing.

Edward Pohlert: She's got a lot of stuff but we were jockeying around my topic right and and she was she was tough and she was really good. It came to my video and she says, oh, you could just put that in the appendix. And I said in the appendix? And I went home that night after you know, like, like we're getting all the chapters ready and everything. And it's my 15 minute video that and I couldn't sleep that night and I woke up, I woke up, I slept a little bit. I woke up in the morning. I said, hey, can we meet for coffee? She said yes. And I went to her and I said, look, I go, with all due respect, I know you said to put in the appendix but an appendix in our bodies is optional. Right, it doesn't serve a purpose like we could take our appendix out and we function fine. It's like it's optional and I go, this can't be optional. This has to be chapter five before someone goes to the conclusion. And she goes, you know what, it's your study and you are the expert in your own narrative. And so let's make it chapter five. And I didn't know how big of a moment that was until after after, you know, I'll get my doctorate and all that. She goes, do you know when you became a doctor? I go, no. She goes, when you made that chapter five, when you put your video as chapter five, because that's what makes you an expert in your study because. And so then I started thinking, okay, I can I can claim that expertise that, you know, just for that, for that moment and for that, for that study. Because sometimes that that whole expert thing it's really intimidating to people. And so my, my students don't call me Dr. Pohlert. I refused to answer that I said, don't ever call me Dr. Polar that's like somebody writing prescriptions. I go, you can call me Edward or something else. And so they thought about it and they collectively said, I remember there's a group in the office with me. They collectively said, how about Dr. P. I said, I'll take that. And it was so loving right because it's like it gives you the respect as we're taught to respect elders and people with authority and titles and all that, but especially culturally based right. Latino culture and Indonesian culture, a lot of cultures right? But it's a it's a term of endearment and so I'm known around here as Dr. P. Like when people say what's your last name I said it's Pohlert, but you can call me Dr. P or Edward either one is fine. So, so I take great pride in that I didn't name myself that they named it. That's, you know, that works.

Sol Suda-Gonzales: That's very wonderfully said. Thank you so much for your participation today. We learned so much from you. I'm going to end it here.