

Narrator: Beatriz Velez

Interviewer: Skylar Minor

Date: May 14, 2024

Location: Zoom

Collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2024

Length of Interview: 00:27:09

Skylar Minor:

All right. All right. My name is Skylar Minor. I'm interviewing with Beatriz Velez. It is Tuesday, May 14th. We are doing our interview over zoom and this is for my ROHP class. So can I get your name, date of birth and where you are from?

Beatriz Velez:

Yes. Hi Skylar. My name is Beatriz Velez. I'm born August 23rd, 1995, meaning I'm a Virgo [laughs] and I am originally from San Diego, California, born and raised in Barrio Logan.

Skylar Minor:

Awesome. How was it growing up where you did? How do you think it impacted your life?

Beatriz Velez:

Yeah, so, I'm actually, like I mentioned, I was born and raised here in Barrio Logan. So my parents are actually immigrants. So they came to San Diego, California in 1994, and then in 1995, they decided to have me. But a little background about my parents history, like I mentioned, they are immigrants. So they came in 1994 and the first place that they arrived was actually Barrio Logan, so Logan Heights, Chicano Park. And my parents it was really an opportunity for my parents to explore. It was really a chance for them to get out of poverty, Mexico City back then. Economy wise, it was very, really, really bad. There was a lot of violence in Mexico City, a lot of drugs happening in Mexico City. So my parents really wanted to avoid that lifestyle and decided that San Diego was a space that they wanted to call home. So they decided to come to the United States, not knowing anybody in San Diego. It was just more of a let's see if we can make it work. So my parents survived in Chicano Park and they actually didn't have a place to go to when they first arrived. So they were staying at the Chicano Park for a few months living under a tree. So really, because they were immigrants, they didn't have any legal status or any proper documentation for them to even apply for a job when they first arrived. So the stories that my parents have told me was the only way that they can earn income was collecting cans from the trash cans around the community in Barrio Logan and they did that for a year. So whatever money they were

able to get, my parents were like, all we can afford was a Maruchan, some fruit and water. And they were surviving with that for a few, a year, year and a half. So there was, and this is a story that my mom told me, because it really changed her perspective of should I go back to home to Mexico or should I keep fighting and stay in San Diego? And that's a really, at least for me, it was a really powerful question, like what would I've done in her case? Like I try and put myself in her shoes cause I'm like, like, I want, I want to make sure that in the future my kids can see, you know, like I'm empowered. I was able to do all these, even though there was hardships, I overcame it. And I was like, Mom, I would have done exactly what you did. I would have kept fighting. So she was telling me that with the time that she was collecting cans with my dad, there was one lady who would always see my parents walking around the community, collecting cans, and she offered herself, she offered her one of her closets inside her home for my parents to live in and my parents actually said yes to it and she was charging my parents no money for it. It was just a tiny little closet that my parents were living in and then slowly but surely, my dad was able to get jobs with just random people that really needed the assistance and he started doing construction and then two years after he arrived in Mexico, and then that way my parents were able to save some money and then rent their own space in Barrio Logan. So ever since my parents arrived in 1994 until now they've been living in Barrio Logan. It's what they call home. There's— their past experiences really has shaped their experiences now living— now in this modern society, challenges are still happening. Barrio Logan is still really a tough place to live in, but it's a, it's a past that they don't ever forget and I love to share that whenever I do, like, histories or, like interviews with, you know, with our students or with our parents, like, it's hard now, but it was also hard in the past. And those experiences that parents had in the past shape the individuals that our kids are facing now, so I'm like, I'm never ashamed to share my parents story because they were homeless, they were, you know, immigrants, but they were able to make it work. They were able to find resources. They were able to figure out what they could do to have a better life and that to me means a lot because they left, you know, the violence back in Mexico and they came to San Diego not knowing what to expect. So again, I come from immigrant families, very proud first generation college grad. And I own all of that to my parents because if they wouldn't have, you know, experienced what they experienced in the past, I wouldn't be here. I do have two younger brothers as well. Actually one of them is going to San Diego State now and they wouldn't have had the chance to even go to education if it wasn't for my parents sacrifices. So again, very proud—proud daughter.

Skylar Minor:

Yes, that's good. Wow. So does that—do you feel like that experience growing up has helped you connect with the students you work with and had a big impact on that?

Beatriz Velez:

Yes. It really does. I feel like when my parents share that story and they even share it with their friends or other parents at the main Barrio Logan site with BLCI, Barrio Logan College Institute. It's a story that I like to say, like my parents lived through that and thanks to that one lady. I think that one lady really shaped my parents' life. Like, if she wouldn't have offered her closet inside her own home to two different, two strangers, my parents were two strangers to the lady, like, I wouldn't be here today or my life would have looked so much different than what it looks now and I feel like that's why, like, working with Barrio Logan College Institute and overseeing the El Cajon site, it's not really a job for me, it's more of the giving back aspect because that one lady gave back to my parents that she offered her support to two different strangers. So, to me, it's— it's not a job to me, it's like, it's my turn to give back to families who may need the support. So, again, this is, this is why I've been working with BLCI for 10 years because more parents are— more immigrant parents are arriving, now El Cajon is full of Middle Eastern families who don't know about the community, who don't know about the educational system. And I'm just like, this is what I love to do. I love to educate. I love to support families and students so I'm able to connect with the parents. I actually haven't had the chance to share that story with our El Cajon, Middle Eastern families. It was mostly the families that I connected before I transitioned over to El Cajon site but it is a story that I do explain to the families who have known me, who are like, deciding like, should I go back to Mexico or should I stay? Because, you know, staying in San Diego does make it, you know, your life will change. You have more opportunities, more resources, and now there's more parents going through the same struggles. It's now a matter of fact of getting all the parents in one space and sharing the stories with them.

Skylar Minor:

Yeah. So switching over to BLCI [Barrio Logan College Institute] then, when did you begin working with them, or when were you introduced to them?

Beatriz Velez:

Yeah, so actually, when my parents— when I was actually in fifth grade, Barrio Logan College Institute was already located in Barrio Logan community and [laughs] education, the academics has never been my strongest suit. So I've always struggled academically. And my mom, like she was a stay at home mom, was always looking around to see, like, how can I help my daughter? How can I help my children? And she was able to find BLCI, so she was able to go ask for help, fill out the application. I'm actually a BLCI alum [alumni]. So I started the program in 5th grade after my mom did the application and I got interviewed to be in the program. So I've been in BLCI since 5th grade. Went through the middle school program and went through the high school program. Actually, BLCI helped me enroll in Point Loma High School, which was the first

diverse school I've ever attended. So before my elementary school, I went to three, low performing schools in Barrio Logan. So it was— At that time, they were low performing schools. It was Perkins Elementary School, Burbank Elementary School and King Chavez Middle School. So those were the three schools that I attended. Again, my mom was always doing her research on how can I help my children academically? How can, you know, she support us with resources or even get— get us involved with sports. I was doing badminton at the beginning, and then I transitioned to soccer and I didn't like soccer, so then I went to boxing and then I finally stayed with— with kickboxing but my mom was always trying to figure out like, how can I expose my daughter to be more confident in her personality and make friends? English was not my first language, it was Spanish. I am the oldest like I mentioned. I do have two younger brothers, so I never learned English by them. It was, either I learned it from friends or I learned it from teachers. So I— I did go to speech therapy classes. Again, English was one of my— my weaknesses. So I was always, you know, getting the support that I needed. BLCI was there actually to support me with that transition. And then once I went to Point Loma High School, I actually got the opportunity to be with other individuals, not just Hispanic families or Hispanic students, which was what I was used to going to Barrio Logan, schools around the community, but Point Loma was very diverse. It was a lot of white students, a lot of African American students, and then a lot of Hispanic students. So that was my actual first experience interacting with other students that didn't look like me. And then after high school, BLCI really gave me the idea of, you can go to college. College was never, you know, an option for me when I was in Point Loma High School. Point Loma High School was really more about you graduate high school and then good luck. But with BLCI was like, you can go to college. So they helped me enroll in community college. I went to City College and then I went to Southwestern College and I was there for three years. So I initially started community college as wanting to become a teacher. Again, I've always liked working with students in some way but then unfortunately, I guess at that time teacher layoffs was a thing, which is still a thing now, but I was like, no, like before it was all about the money. So my— my perspective, my mentality when I was right after high school was like, I want money. [laughs] I want to be able to, you know, be independent. So then I changed my major after my first year to business. So I did business. I did business admin for the second— the two years that I have left over at community college and then I needed one class, like I mentioned, academics was never in my strongest suit, so I— I didn't get a chance to pass biology in community college, so that didn't— so that was kind of like a setback for me cause I wasn't able to get my associate's degree or even consider applying to CSUs or UCs because I wasn't completing the general ed classes. And again, I tried my best to, you know, get the support academically with sciences. Sciences has always been [groans] a tough subject for me. So then I decided— I spoke to my mom and I'm like, mom, like, community college is not for me. Like, what can I do? Like, I'm mentally exhausted and

then my mom was like, okay, try and do something that you love to do. So after high school, I was just volunteering with BLCI [Barrio Logan College Institute]. I was like, okay, I want to help students. I was volunteering with the elementary school program and then that was when my mom and I had a conversation like you love working with students. She was like, keep doing it. Keep volunteering with the BLCI. Keep, you know, supporting the first generation students. So she— my mom was like a really big motive, like a reason why, like I continue working with students and in my head, I'm like, I should have just stayed with teaching. [laughs] I would have been— I would have been a great teacher.

Skylar Minor:
[laughs]

Beatriz Velez:

But again, I started volunteering after high school. And then, after I completed and I got my associate's degree in business administration I did take some time off, so I didn't apply to any UCs or CSU. It was really an opportunity for me to figure out what I want to pursue. I knew I wanted to do something with business, but at the same time my heart was telling me students and families is what I wanted to do. So the year, the year gap that I took off, I started working with BLCI as a part time employee. So I became a program assistant working with elementary— elementary school students but at the same time, I still have the connection with working with families and letting them know here, your students are academically struggling in math, science, english or history, which is very funny because academically I wasn't the strongest, but I was giving advice to the students like, hey, let's, you know, do mentoring programs or let's do tutoring services. It's so funny now that I think about it, I'm just like, [laughs] great advice that I couldn't apply at that time of my life. And then after that, I decided to— after the year gap and a year working with BLCI, I'm like— I was like, I really want to apply to CSUs, I want to go to San Diego State. So I did the application in 2019 and I changed my major, once again, to liberal arts. I really wanted to learn a little bit more about my history, Chicano, Chicano history and use that knowledge to empower the families at Barrio Logan cause at that time, I was working at Barrio Logan, with BLCI. So I decided to take some classes while I waited for admissions to get back to me. I decided to take some Chicano studies classes at City College and Southwestern College to see if it's something I really wanted to pursue, not knowing I was going to get in the program. So I applied, three months later, I got the letter saying congratulations, you've been admitted to liberal arts at San Diego State, and I was like, oh my god, and that's funny because at that time, I got pregnant, I ended up being pregnant with my son, Joseph. And I'm like, I won't be able to go to school. Like, how is my pregnancy— again another— in my head, I'm like, it's another setback, like I want to focus my entire time raising my son, not knowing, I

didn't know I was going to get into state and then I saw the letter and I'm like, what am I going to do? Like, I don't want to lose this opportunity, but at the same time, I want to focus on raising my son and then COVID hit. So the pandemic hit. Everything went virtual. It was actually like a blessing. I know it was very hard COVID with everything that was going on in the community and families. But in my— for me personally, it was a blessing because I was able to continue my education via Zoom, do my first year online and at the same time, raising my boy. So you see me during my Zoom classes like switching my baby while I'm over here breastfeeding my son, but again, it all turned out and my mom was like everything happens for a reason like do not— don't see anything negatively because it works— it ends up like, life just ends up working out for you and it did. So during the first year of the pandemic, all my year was online. All my classes are online. And then towards my last year at San Diego State, everything went back to normal. We had the face masks, back to in person classes, but I was almost done. I needed a few more classes and my boy was a little bit older. I wasn't breastfeeding him anymore. So I was able to take night— so evening classes at the time that my son slept, I was able to take evening classes. And at the same time, I was still working with BLCI during the pandemic, and during my time at San Diego State and during the pandemic, I was actually promoted to being the parent coordinator. So again, this is amazing because, you know, as I wanted to focus on teaching and working with students and also working with families, BLCI gave me the opportunity to work with parents. So now I was overseeing the parent program and was able to connect families with resources about mental health, COVID resources, since COVID was what was currently happening in the community. I was able to do communication skills, financial literacy classes for parents so they can, you know, save money and not— at that time there was a lot of funding going out to the families, pandemic checks, EBT stamps, everything was going out for the families. And I was just there supporting families, like, we're signing up for EBT. Let's do this together. Let's meet via Zoom. So again, I did a lot for the parents during the pandemic. And that was like another motive, like, wow, like, I do want to do this in the future. Like, I really want to get my bachelor's degree. I was so motivated. I'm like, doing my best in the middle of the night, breastfeeding my son, studying to make sure I passed all my classes. And then as time goes by, it's like graduation days coming up in May, and I graduated from San Diego State. My son was two years old when I graduated. I'm like, time just went by so fast. Like, I didn't even, like, it's so sad because I didn't get to experience San Diego State as much as I would want it to because of the whole pandemic but the time that I did have, it was online. I ended up doing so many activities with BLCI parents. But at the same time, I was able to create the SPA program at San Diego State. So the Parent— Parent Association Alliance program that San Diego State has. So I kind of founded— founded that program. And I know it's still going strong with San Diego State, so I was part of that. So in a way I was still involved working with parents, networking with other new parents at San Diego State. And then after I

graduated from San Diego State, BLCI decided that I would be a great candidate to oversee the El Cajon site. So they promoted me to being the El Cajon manager and I've been doing that ever since. So again, like when I mentioned like my parents really shaped and BLCI really shaped my future, they really did. Cause again, that one lady opened the doors to all these possibilities that my— my parents had. That lady gave my parents a home. My mom was able to find resources like BLCI to support me and my brothers, and from there, BLCI just continued to push me, like, Community College, let's do the UC or CSU applications, let's do this together, and now it's my turn to give back to the family, so, again, it's been a huge, huge blessing, I owe it all to that one lady, I wish I knew who that lady was, but again, that one lady, it's the reason why I'm giving back now.

Skylar Minor:

That is so crazy. It's the— it's like the butterfly effect. Everything happens because one thing happens and it shifts everything. That's so crazy.

Beatriz Velez:

Yeah.

Skylar Minor

Do you plan to like, once your son gets a little bit older, cause it's third grade, right? That they can— they can begin.

Beatriz Velez:

Correct.

Skylar Minor:

But do you plan on like him doing it all the way through?

Beatriz Velez:

Unfortunately, he can't because he's not first generation. I graduated from San Diego State, so he's not first generation anymore. But I do hope that, you know, I know he still sees me like now that he's older, he's in preschool. He's like, Mommy, why are you going to work? Like, why don't you stay with me home? So I do have those conversations. I know he doesn't really understand me. But I do have those conversations like mama's helping students and mama's helping families. Just so he has an idea that, you know, in the future, like I know he's not going to be first generation, but I really want him to appreciate my history, like my mom's history. And because my mom was, you know, went through all those hardships, I— I went through some hardships as well, growing up being first gen, not having siblings, not learning the

English language but because I went through that, my parents went through that, my son is able to have an easier life. He's able to go to school, he's able to have friends, he doesn't have to walk to go get to certain locations. He has a— mama has a car now, right? She has a degree so she can support you. So I want— I really want him to know that, you know, there were sacrifices made a long, long time ago, and I just want him to appreciate the things that he has, because I know a lot of families now don't have those opportunities. They're going through similar challenges that my parents went through, and I don't want him, my son, to take things for granted. I want him to appreciate the things he has now, because the future is crazy. You don't know what can happen in the future. Mama may not— I tell him, mama may not have money next year, you never know. So the toys and the things that I get you, you need to take care of it and you need to share, and I do want him to carry that on when he's older. I wanted to help, you know, families and help students, and do what he loves to do. I know he's very friendly. My boy loves going to BLCI. He's sometimes there, you know, interacting with the third graders. He loves it. It's— it's— it's home for me. And I know that, you know, even though he won't be able to participate in BLCI, I know he's one day going to go back as a middle schooler or high schooler and, you know, give back and tutor students.

Skylar Minor:

Yeah, that's awesome. That is so awesome. So being involved in BLCI for so long and you've seen so many different stages of it. Is there anything that you feel like you would change about the program that you feel like needs to be done better?

Beatriz Velez:

So I have been through all the phases that BLCI has gone through. Starting from going from this storage facility to renting a space inside Monarch School to now officially having our own building in Barrio Logan. One of the things that I would definitely do different is take some time to really expand the locations that we have in Chula Vista and El Cajon. Again, the families are not different. Barrio Logan families, Chula Vista families, and El Cajon families face the same challenges, which is lack of education, lack of resources, and I didn't know that, and that was something that I apologized for, because I know when we had initially talked about, we're gonna, you know, open a site in El Cajon, I was in denial, like, no, like, that's a bad choice, like, don't do that, that's a wrong investment, and on my part, I do apologize for that, because I— I wasn't knowledgeable about the needs of El Cajon. And that's something that I would probably change. It's like get informed about what's happening in different communities because each community does have some things that are different from other communities, but there are a lot of similarities happening in El Cajon, Chula Vista and Barrio Logan, like, all the families want the students to be college graduates. That's our goal. It's for them to break that cycle of poverty in the

household, to give back to the communities, to be leaders, to advocate for their rights and that's what we all want to do. So really, like, again, it's not more of a, I want to change, I just want to implement structure into those sites. So whenever, you know, I, you know, part away and somebody else takes my role, like I wanted— I want the sites to be fully accessible. I want Middle Eastern families, Hispanic families to know, Oh, El Cajon is right there at Johnson Avenue or in Chula Vista so they know where to go and I think right now because El Cajon is growing and it's so tiny that parents don't know that we exist yet. So that's one of the things that I definitely want to change is spreading the word about the program. A lot of families know BLCI- El Cajon as just a tutoring program or just a soccer program, but they don't really understand that it's more than that. It's— it's community, it's home, it's making— it's a 10 year commitment and parents might seem intimidated by that, but 10 years, 3 years, 5 years, it goes by so fast. And by the time you notice, the students are graduating from a 4 year institution. So I really want parents to understand the value of what it means to be a BLCI student. It's an opportunity. Not every student gets to be enrolled in our program, and I feel like families in El Cajon are not there yet. So that is maybe one of the things that I want to change. Before I part ways, right? [laughs] So again, I would continue to stay with El Cajon until I know that the site is fully functioning there and then I'll know that I made an impact in East County.

Skylar Minor:

Yeah, well I definitely think you've had an impact. Is there any, like, talk at all of expanding to, like, other sites in San Diego or is it just going to continue with the three that you mentioned?

Beatriz Velez:

So, I know that we have talked about it in the past, but I think the smart move is to continue to invest our resources in those Chula Vista and El Cajon sites, only because, again, we want to make sure that families are aware, like, okay, we exist. We are here to support students. And again, I feel like, in my own personal view, if we were to expand, let's say, in San Ysidro, and El Cajon and Chula Vista are not functioning correctly, then there's no point of adding more services and putting more stress on the people's plate when two other sites are not there yet. So I think it would be a strategic move to focus, specifically in El Cajon and Chula Vista, get the support that we need there at those sites, and then potentially, maybe in 10 years, talk about expanding to another community.

Skylar Minor:

That makes sense. That definitely makes sense. Is there anything else that you want to bring up or discuss or questions?

Beatriz Velez:

Yeah, I think that being a first generation college grad, it's— it's very diff— it's very difficult. You know, I had many challenges with the educational system but one of the things I learned is that trust the timing of things. At least that for me, that's what I told myself every single day that I was going to community college and even going to state. It's— I can't pressure myself to be a perfectionist. I think it's more of figuring out your passion. Why are you doing things? And it's really don't focus a lot on what am I going to get in return, it's more, what can you do, because I do believe— believe that if you do great things, great things will come back to you and just be really passionate about what you do. And whoever sees this, graduate, take some time to, you know, find yourself, love— do what you love to do and great things will come your way.

Skylar Minor:

That's very important. I think that is a very important message. Awesome. Well, if there is nothing else, then thank you so much for interviewing with me. Yeah. Thank you.

Beatriz Velez:

Of course. Thank you.