

**DREAMING IN PUBLIC:
The testimonios of four undocumented college students**

by

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This work is a collaboration between the researcher and four undocumented young people: two college students and two recent college graduates. The centerpiece of the collection consists of the testimonios of the narrators in which they tell their stories of being undocumented in the United States. These are preceded by a study of U.S. immigration policy and literary critical accounts of the genre of testimonio. They are succeeded by reflections on the testimonios, the importance of collaborative research, and how the project transformed the researcher's understanding of both the political and academic work. The study concludes that in such academic research the product should be modeled to serve the goals of its participants who represent a community outside of the academy, rather than those of academic experts alone.

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PREFACE

We were sitting in a University Building in Minnesota. Our meeting was winding down, and we swiveled in our brightly colored futuristic chairs to look out the wall of windows overlooking the river, a vague impression of downtown in the distance. Oscar looked professional and fashionable in his pastel pink shirt, smart glasses, and shiny dress shoes. I wondered if he had a change of clothes for his bike ride home, and if it was a mistake for me to wear cutoff white jean shorts. We had finished editing his testimonio, but our conversation pushed forward with occasional lulls as we studied the view. I offered him a ride home, and assumed we were done for the day. Then, out of a lull he mentioned that I knew almost everything about him, but he knew nothing about me, and asked if we could switch roles. I said yes, of course, and waited curiously to hear what he wanted to know.

“I still don’t really get it. Why are you doing this project, why do you care about this?”

I struggled through an answer for him, though I didn’t feel satisfied with it, and I’m sure he didn’t either. What brought a fourth generation white American from a comfortable suburb of the Twin Cities to be interested in the lives of undocumented college students? I think that as with many crossroads in life, I arrived at the project through a series of fortuitous accidents. Once there, I undertook a project that was deliberate, political, and all-consuming. But it didn’t begin that way. It began in conversations that I did not plan. I flag some of the accidents that

brought me to these pages to offer a genealogy of the project that can answer Oscar's question and to reflect on the role of things beyond one's control both in my life and in those of the narrators of the testimonios.

Santos

In high school, when I first began to understand the idea of "human rights" and how often they are denied, I felt the need to reject my privilege. A girl who had been researching colleges since middle school, I abandoned that plan and decided that college would be a selfish choice. Then the summer before my senior year, I traveled to El Salvador with a school group. I spent an afternoon talking with Santos, the bus-driver, despite my broken Spanish. He told me with pride about his daughters who were attending college -- a great accomplishment for a man who as a child ran away from home because his parents couldn't afford to feed him.

On our last night he addressed the whole group through a translator, but I was convinced that the message was for me. He told us a parable about a young prince whose father told him that the time had come for the prince to become king. The young prince did not feel ready to take on such responsibility, and wanted to deny the position. He then decided to put on ordinary clothes and go into the village. He spent the day listening to the people, learning of their struggles and hopes. That night, when he returned to the castle, he told his father that he was ready to be king. Santos finished the story—which I'm sure was much more elegant in his Spanish rendition—and told us that now we had lived with and listened to the people, and it was time for us to go back home and use our privilege in a way that would benefit not only ourselves, but the people we had met.

His words convinced me that rejecting the education so many people dreamed of was not noble, but to put it bluntly, stupid. Nothing says privilege like turning down an amazing opportunity to learn, simply because you don't want it.

Los Jóvenes

I arrived to college with no interest in immigration and lost as to my role in any sort of social movement. Friends from my dorm invited me to *Jovenes Sin Nombres* (JSN), an immigrant art collective and youth group. For whatever reason, whether it was an immediate connection with the people or recognition of the issue's importance, I became an active member -- though I had to ask what the DREAM Act was on the bus ride home from the meeting. JSN became a central part of my college experience, and introduced me both to the historical and political relevance of immigrant rights and the importance of art in the growing movement.

Carlos

During this time, I managed to almost completely ignore that my high school best friend, who in the spring of freshman year became my boyfriend, was himself a Mexican immigrant. Eventually we began to talk more about it, and six months into our relationship, he told me he had a huge Christmas present for me. Lying in the dark one night, he said that he was ready: it was something he had to tell me. The stutter of his bilingual childhood came back in full force; he couldn't say anything. Eventually, they snuck out in a whisper, two Spanish words I didn't understand: "*Soy chocolate.*" I asked him what they meant, but truthfully I already knew. The clues had been piling up. I had just needed to hear him say it in English, though he never did and I don't think he ever has. "I'm undocumented."

DREAMers

On June 15, 2012 I sat in front of the television, waiting for Obama to enter the Rose Garden and announce deferred action for the DREAMers. After a few minutes of being subjected to the objections of Sheriff Joe Arpaio the news stations were using as filler, I realized I was only a few blocks from the White House and didn't need to spend the historic moment glued to a screen. I arrived as a group of activists marched onto Pennsylvania Avenue from the park. I stood on the sidelines, out of place among the reporters in my running clothes. “¡SI SE PUDO!” “FOUR MORE YEARS!” The energy behind the chants was of a level I had never experienced. In Spanish and in English, students shared their stories and committed to fight until this one small victory led to comprehensive reform.

I returned to my internship at the Immigration Policy Center (which I applied for at 3 a.m. one night after happening upon the announcement) the next week with new energy. Though I enjoyed the people at the center, and appreciated the work we were doing— producing reports and advocating for reform—there was something troubling to me in knowing that no one in my division was herself or himself an immigrant. The office atmosphere could not rival the energy I had felt on the street, nor the determination I witnessed a week later when DREAM leaders such as Gaby Pacheco, José Antonio Vargas, and Erika Andiola spoke at a press conference. Returning from Washington, I knew that I had to work on immigration. Even more: I wanted to complete a project *with* DREAMers, not about them.

PART 1 CONTEXTUALIZING THE TESTIMONIOS

My discontent with immigration policy and with the current academic and political discourse surrounding it helped me define my goal: to bring the voices of undocumented students into formal conversations about immigration in the United States. The process itself and the insights of the narrators have redefined this purpose by challenging my understanding of the political, the importance of literature, and the function of my work. This redefinition represents for me the success of the process. Part of this thesis has involved working towards the realization that influencing opinion and policy is a secondary concern for me as compared to mining the political power of the literary that is contained in the testimonios that follow.

My work is synthetic in two important ways. First it is interdisciplinary, with interest in social science, history, policy, law, and the literary. Second, it is synthetic in its collaborative nature. I chose the framework of testimonio to limit the importance of my voice in stories I found to be more compelling when told in the voices of those living them. My hope is that together we have created an accessible work which honors the experiences of all those involved.

A. HISTORY AND POLICY

Providing a macro-political context for the experiences of undocumented college students could be an entire project in itself. Therefore I will limit my observations to the aspects of the system directly influencing the stories featured in this project.

Globally, studies of immigration policy counter the idea that “globalization” has made the nation-state and its borders less relevant. According to Stephen Castles (2011):

Liberalization of flows was never complete—for instance rich countries protected their own agriculture while demanding the removal of barriers for others. But the hypocrisy was greatest with regard to flows of people, where control of cross-border movements was seen as a crucial aspect of nation-state sovereignty. Economists argued that the removal of restrictions on human mobility would lead to large increases in global income (Bhagwati, 2003; Nayar, 1994), but politicians in labour-importing countries were aware of popular suspicion of immigration, and responded with a rhetoric of national interests and control (312).

Although the global economy pushes towards a free flow of ideas and products, many anti-immigration groups believe that if national borders do not restrict the flow of human populations and labor, “developed” nations will be invaded by low-skilled immigrants. The “popular suspicion of immigration” Castle alludes to includes racist and classist sentiments recognizable in daily colloquial discourse: Muslim immigrants are terrorists; immigrants disrupt the national identity; Mexicans steal American jobs; Catholics will overrun the Protestant population. More dangerously, these sentiments are institutionalized through law: the French ban on the full-face veil, the rise of the Golden Dawn in Greece, and the draconian immigration bills in Arizona and Alabama. While migrants attempt to embrace a transnational identity, nativist ideology persists within many developed nations, arguably strengthened by the financial crisis of 2008. I say all of this to frame the individual stories of this collection in their global context: These narrators are representative not only of the U.S. immigration problem, but of the worldwide phenomenon

which denies the right of movement to those who are not of a privileged race or class background.

However, legal restrictions and public opinion do not halt immigration, legal or otherwise. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, in 2011 the total immigrant population of the United States reached 40.4 million, of which 11.1 million were unauthorized (“A Nation of Immigrants”). Of course the United States has always been a destination for immigrants, and there has historically been a temporary push against the incoming people until they assimilate; but Rouse (1991) argues that with the latest (Latino-dominated) influx of immigration, the country has been less effective at forcing assimilation. This may be in part due to what Coutin (2011) refers to as the context of reception: “If people are deemed to be illegal or are subject to discrimination, then their ability to assimilate and to be upwardly mobile is adversely affected” (291). The result is that (in reference specifically to Mexico), “The international border is widening and, at the same time, miniature borders are erupting throughout the two countries” (Rouse 17). It is one such miniature border that the narrators in this project straddle, metaphorically if not literally citizenship-less in a system which places high value on the nation to which one belongs.

Their condition of liminality can be largely traced to the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA). This act was an attempt by the United States to halt unauthorized immigration with three main objectives: “legalizing long-term undocumented residents, making it more difficult for employers to hire undocumented workers (thus removing the incentive of such employment), and stiffening border enforcement” (Coutin 293). In practice, the Act has an adverse effect. Before 1986, workers could migrate cyclically between their home country and the United States, but with the new law the border became more violent, causing the

danger and cost of crossing to increase. Combined with Section 212 of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, which (alongside prohibiting the entrance of Nazis and terrorists) places a ten-year bar on those who have “been unlawfully present in the United States for one year or more” (Immigration and Nationality Act), IRCA made returning home an unviable option. This is clearly visible in the testimonios of this collection: most of the narrators have never returned to Mexico and many of their parents have chosen not to return for funerals or other important familial events.

Though push-factors in their home nation-states may lead migrants to disregard certain laws upon entrance into the country, Coutin argues that “law has a profound impact on these immigrants’ lives regardless of whether it deters them from migrating” (292). The 2001 PATRIOT Act allows the indefinite detention of “illegal aliens,” even if they are not deportable for terrorism. The passing of this Act can be tied to the criminalization of migration, shaping how migrants view themselves and are viewed by citizens. Motomura (2006) argues that while immigrants were previously seen as “Americans in waiting,” this is no longer the case (202). Today, both undocumented migrants and legal residents are defined by their deportability. The fear of deportation leads to “the legal production of ‘illegality’ as a distinctly spatialized and typically racialized social condition for undocumented migrants” (De Genova 439).

Though De Genova argues that this production of illegality is an attempt to produce migrants as vulnerable and therefore exploitable workers, there is “a potential for migrants to challenge their own marginalization—and perhaps to do so through the law” (Coutin 291). This potential has been actualized most strongly by the DREAMer movement of the 21st century. The 2.1 million children and young adults of the 1.5 generation— self-named “DREAMers”— took their name from the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, a

bipartisan piece of legislation introduced for the first time in 2001 by Dick Durbin and Orrin Hatch. The bill would provide conditional permanent residency to undocumented immigrants who met certain criteria, notably graduation from high school, arrival as a minor, living in the United States continuously for over five years, and enrollment in an institution of higher education or the military.

Despite over ten years of discussion, the bill has not passed. This frustration has only strengthened the DREAM movement, led by young undocumented people who have come out nationally, such as *Time* journalist José Antonio Vargas. Their increase in visibility and strength over years of organizing finally mounted enough pressure on the Executive Branch in 2012. On June 15 President Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA was intended as a temporary solution for young DREAMers, who upon their high school graduation, are faced with an impossible situation. They are ineligible for in-state tuition, most scholarships, and all government aid (except in states that have passed their own DREAM Acts, which will be discussed later), making college a huge and often impossible financial burden. They are legally unable to accept any work. Finally, if they decide to return “home” to a country they most likely do not remember, they will be banned from reentering the United States for ten years. DACA is meant to be a “band-aid” for this problem by granting a two-year non-resident status and a work permit to students who would be eligible for the DREAM Act. Along with this Executive Action came a campaign promise to make comprehensive reform a number one priority.

Seeing that attempts to pass comprehensive reform have been hopelessly stalled since Obama’s reelection, the DREAMers have increased their pressure. The most striking example of this is the “#BringThemHome” campaign. In July 2013 nine young undocumented immigrants—

labeled the “Dream 9”—approached the Morley Gate in Nogales, Arizona. Wearing graduation caps and gowns, they asked to be let into the United States. All nine were detained at the Eloy Detention Center for 17 days (most in solitary confinement) before the Obama Administration allowed them to return to their homes in the United States. According to a Media Advisory from the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA), “The group...received the support of hundreds of organizations, including national advocacy groups and labor unions. A total of 43 members of Congress sent letters to the president in support of the Dream 9. An online petition supporting them received more than 27,000 signatures” (“Dreamers to Cross Border”).

On September 30 because “the president and House Republicans dashed the immigrant community’s hopes for relief this year,” (“Dreamers to Cross Border”) 34 more students attempted to enter the country and were detained. At the time of this writing 25 are still in detention. This time, parents of the Dream 34 have become involved, pressuring Texan Congressman Henry Cuellar—whose district the Dream 34 entered through—to write a letter expressing support to Obama through a sit-in and attempts at dialogue (“Urgent”). The involvement of parents is a concrete representation of the most recent DREAMer rhetoric. Before, they lobbied for the DREAM Act, but they are now interested in more comprehensive reform which would include relief for their parents.

In some states, such as California and most recently Minnesota, DREAMers have already achieved local victories in the forms of state-specific DREAM Acts. These Acts cannot provide a path to citizenship or access to federal financial aid, but they do provide access to in-state tuition and state-funded scholarship. On May 23, 2013, the MN DREAM Act was signed into law, granting in-state tuition rates and state financial aid to undocumented students who meet certain criteria. This change had not affected the experiences of the narrators in this collection, as the aid

did not become available until after we completed the interviews. Still, even before the DREAM Act, Minnesota had a system that was more easily navigated than those of states such as Pennsylvania. The idea that undocumented students cannot pay in-state tuition comes from Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which states that undocumented students, “shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State (or a political subdivision) for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national in the United States is eligible for such a benefit. . .” (“Illegal Immigration Reform”). This language left a loophole for states to work around the residency issue by offering in-state tuition based on a different factor. Minnesota, for example offers in-state tuition to graduates of Minnesota high schools, regardless of their residency (Russell). This may explain why I was able to find a strong undocumented student network in Minnesota, but could not connect to a single undocumented college student in Pennsylvania.

The differences between Minnesota and Pennsylvania illustrate a notable rescaling of immigration policy from a primarily federal issue to one that is more and more controlled by the states (Coutin). While this allows some cities to call themselves “sanctuaries” and states to pass legislation such as the DREAM Act, the negative results have far outweighed the positive. The most prominent example is Section 2(B) of Arizona S.B. 1070. This section—the only disputed section not enjoined by the Supreme Court—“provides that officers who conduct a stop, detention, or arrest must in some circumstances make efforts to verify the person’s immigration status with the Federal Government” (“Arizona”). By requiring the police force to take interest in immigration status, the Arizona Act furthers the criminalization of immigration. Laws like this, or the Hazelton, Pennsylvania city ordinance that requires landlords to check immigration status, are part of a movement towards “Attrition through Enforcement” (Coutin). States

interested in removing their undocumented population use draconian law to make life excessively difficult for the undocumented people. Due to the racialization of illegality, this also affects all people who “look” undocumented – a form of profiling that has been studied in relation to traffic stops and has led to the common phrase “driving while brown” (Mucchetti).

Strong anti-immigrant policies are fueled by racist and nationalist sentiment that—against widely accepted research—still believes immigrants are criminals who are economically and culturally destroying the United States. Though there has been more sympathy from both parties for the DREAMers (under the idea that they are not at fault for their parents’ actions), there remain lawmakers and citizens such as Representative Steve King, most recently notorious for his comment in an interview with Newsmax:

There are kids that were brought into this country by their parents unknowing they were breaking the law. And they will say to me and others who defend the rule of law, ‘We have to do something about the 11 million. Some of them are valedictorians.’ Well, my answer to that is... it’s true in some cases, but they aren’t all valedictorians. They weren’t all brought in by their parents. For every one who’s a valedictorian, there’s another 100 out there who weigh 130 pounds and they’ve got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’re hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert. Those people would be legalized with the same act (Rosenthal).

Though King is an extreme example, he represents the need for DREAMers to tell their stories and counter this rhetoric.

My thesis aims to be part of the larger DREAMer movement. It provides a counterargument to the idea that the successful DREAM activists are misrepresenting their wider community. By personalizing the highly politicized immigration debate in the United States, this collection began as a small attempt to contribute to the DREAM movement.

B. VOICE, FORM, AND RISK

As a writer, I approached the macro-political issue of immigration through the lens of the individual, zooming into the lives of the undocumented students I spoke to. As I delved further into the conversation surrounding immigration reform, I saw that my interest in their voices and in their micro-political experience was linked to the larger political strategies of DREAMer activists.

At the 2013 Power Shift Conference in Pittsburgh, *United We Dream* leader Sofia Campos used the catch phrase often associated with testimonio to describe the importance of speaking out: “the personal is the political.” Students at UCLA published a book, *Underground Undergrads: Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*, which features the stories of eight undocumented students accompanied by an overview of legislation and a guide for taking action (López). The website “DREAMERS ADRIFT” created by four undocumented youths is “[a] creative project ABOUT undocumented youth, BY undocumented youth, and FOR undocumented youth.” This description strongly echoes the democratic vision of the United States articulated in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (Lincoln). In the case of DREAMERS ADRIFT, the writers have been denied citizenship and therefore had to create their own space to exercise agency. Their stated purpose: “We are trying to document the undocumented. We’re putting our life on display through videos, art, music, spoken word, prose and poetry” (DREAMERS ADRIFT).

Another striking example of this strategy is the video uploaded to YouTube by Erika Andiola after her mother and brother were taken by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in which she emotionally recounts what happened, and then through her sobs makes a powerful call to action, “This needs to stop. We need to do something, we need to stop

separating families, and this is real. This is so real. This is not just happening to me, this is happening to families everywhere. We cannot let this happen anymore” (“Erika Andiola’s family separated”). Due to her prominent role as an activist in Arizona and nationally, Erika’s video prompted a public response, and her mother and brother were released within twelve hours. Though this was a victory, Erika’s concern extended beyond her family. In a video uploaded after their release, she and her family thank everyone for their help, and urge them to come out and share their own stories, because “we need to stop deportations overall” (“IT’S NOT OVER”).

These examples embody the DREAM movement’s belief that individualizing the immigration problem in the United States will positively influence policy and the mental state of those sharing their stories. The failure of the 1986 reform and other similar laws can be traced to their disconnectedness from the experiences and understandings of the migrants themselves. DREAM Activists hope that their influence can stop this from being the case in future reform.

Individualizing the immigration problem requires migrants to “come out” about their status. As pointed out to me by Irma, one of the undocumented student- narrators in this collection who wrote her own senior thesis on this subject, strategies of “coming out” as an undocumented student today can be understood through analogy to the gay rights movement. She and other activists have seen the success that came from the simple act of more queer people coming out in their communities, and have implemented the same idea within their own movement, as exemplified by the chant “undocumented and unafraid.” Whether in relation to queer, mentally ill, or racially discriminated-against people, research shows that contact is a powerful way to challenge stigma (Corrigan). Furthermore, beyond the sociopolitical importance of this coming out, there are personal benefits proven to result from “disclosing a stigmatized

status...Perhaps key among these is the removal of the stress that results from having to no longer keep a secret on such an important part of one's identity" (Corrigan 241). Other benefits include better interpersonal relationships and increased self-esteem. Using the gay rights movement as a point of comparison—which is exactly what many young DREAMers are doing—it becomes easier to see why the act of coming out is important on a public and personal level. It changes both the person who comes out and the person or people to whom they come out to.

With these considerations in mind, I decided that a collaborative work would be the most effective way for me to serve as a vehicle in the larger immigrant rights movement. I did not feel that I had the knowledge or skill to imagine a fiction, nor did I feel that would be productive. Instead, I felt that I could facilitate a project with two goals: to influence the beliefs of the readership and to empower those involved as narrators. Through my studies in Latin American literature, I encountered testimonio, and felt that it would be the most productive form to use for this process.

i. Testimonio

Testimonio is a post-boom literary genre defined by John Beverley as “a novel or novella-length narrative told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real-life protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts” (Beverley “On All Things Modern” 1). Most testimonio is the product of a collaboration between a narrator (usually someone who has witnessed a form of oppression) and a compiler (usually an “intellectual” and part of the privileged class). As a genre, it self-consciously attempts to project the personal as the political. Successful testimonio will re-center the protagonist into a position of narrative authority while enlisting a coalition to combat the injustices presented. The form has become popular as a method of scholarship and activism: “There has been an explosion of testimonio scholarship in academia, with “testimonios” appearing in 36 dissertations and theses from 1990–1999 and soaring to 835 during the 2000–2009 period” (Bernal 364). Testimonios are far from a canonical literary genre, perhaps because they are so clearly driven by political urgency.

The most famous and perhaps the most influential testimonio is *Me llamo Riboberta Menchú y así me nació de conciencia*, a collaboration between Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos. Menchú’s goal is not to provide a “whole truth,” but “rather to act tactically in a way she hopes and expects will advance the interests of the community and social groups and classes her testimonio represents” (Beverley “Testimonio” 75). Any desire to possess an overarching understanding of her experience would work against the idea that testimonio should “displace the centrality of intellectuals, and what they recognize as culture—including literature” (Beverley “Testimonio” 69). Testimonio is not written primarily for the readers’ enjoyment or for their

expansion of knowledge beyond what the narrator considers necessary to illustrate and change her situation. Doris Sommer speaks to this purposeful boundary with a warning to the reader not to feel entitled to overarching understanding: “Readers bent on understanding may neglect another kind of engagement, one that would make respect a reading requirement” (Sommer ix). Testimonio is a project of empowerment, both in its process and in the distribution of the manuscript to a larger readership. As Menchú states in the famous last lines of her testimonio, “I’m still keeping secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (Burgos 247). In this statement Menchú expresses her refusal to be exploited in the process of speaking from a disadvantaged perspective. She refuses to become an *object* of knowledge. She withholds full access to her life, and readers are expected to observe the distance between themselves and the narrator.

Menchú represents the classic form of testimonio, but more recently some scholars have expanded the genre by defining the idea of marginality more broadly. Traditionally, it is assumed in testimonio that the narrator and compiler will occupy very different roles in society. In the case of my work, in many ways we as students occupy the same space. Scholars with definitions similar to Beverley’s would say that “...if the narrator has attained the cultural status of an author (and generally speaking middle or upper class status), she has transitioned from the subaltern group identity to an individualized identity” (Delgado Bernal 366). However, Delgado Bernal et al. argue (specifically speaking about Chicana/Latina scholars, but in a way that I think is relevant to DREAMers) that this is not the case: “A group identity and group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when we have attained a relatively privileged status” (366). While Beverley labels Gloria Anzaldúa—famous for her work in Chicana and queer theory and

her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*—as a “postmodern performance artist” (“Testimonio” 74), these Chicana scholars call her work, and especially the anthology she co-edited, *This Bridge Called My Back*, testimonio, though it does not take the traditional narrative form and she is not speaking through anyone in a position of institutionalized power greater than her own. Anzaldúa and her counterparts write about their personal experiences to make strong political statements: addressing a wide audience but not letting themselves become objects to be studied. This is especially clear with much of Anzaldúa’s work, which switches between English and Spanish without translation for an English-only audience. With this choice, she is de-centering a large segment of her audience while centering herself and her bilingual community.

For the purposes of my own work I took from both the more traditional testimonio theory and from the perspective of prominent Chicana scholars. Though all of the narrators are not only literate in English, but also possess the skills to write academically, I still chose the narrator/compiler approach. I have chosen the terms “narrator” and “compiler” (used by Ariana Mangual Gigueroa in her work) over other terms such as speaker and editor. “Narrator” implies that the subject is thoughtfully and intentionally guiding the story towards its conclusion. I use the term because it attributes control to the subject. To me, editor implies a position of authority: the member of the team who finalizes the piece and has the last say in decisions at both the structural and thematic level. Put differently, a compiler is at the service of the narrator: she influences the product, but in a way that serves or complements the goals of the narrator.

My possession of a Social Security Number could not be ignored as an identifier of difference. As explained by Ariana Mangual Gigueroa:

Our joint engagement in grassroots activism did not erase the differential power relations inherent in delivering, recording, and publishing testimonio. In fact, we were acutely aware of the ways in which our different roles constituted the social conditions that made the production and circulation of testimonio possible (2).

Still, as students, my narrators and I occupy similar spaces of power. Most of the narrators come from originally upper-class backgrounds, have educated parents, and live in neighborhoods comparable to my own. The narrators who have already graduated possess higher positions of power than me in terms of educational status. All four of the narrators would be capable of writing their own testimonios, which made it necessary to question the necessity of working collaboratively.

Despite the ideals of the genre, throughout the process I was conscious of the great risks involved in working collaboratively and navigating our sometimes subtle, sometimes glaring differences in status. Still, I contend that this and other collaborative projects have benefits that outweigh these risks. And fear of such risks should not be used as an excuse for avoiding dialogue, for dialogue is the basis of real social change.

Testimoniando, the dialogical aspect of the project, is just as important as the production of a concrete narrative. It is my belief, which was affirmed by some of the narrators in conversation, that there is a value in being listened to, that being listened to can recenter one in a way that sitting down to write in solitude cannot. This is not to say that writing cannot be empowering, but that dialogue may give a more concrete demonstration that your audience is actively interested in what you have to say. The collaborative nature of the narrator-compiler relationship puts more emphasis on the process of testimoniando.

Looked at thus, my position as a student may have been beneficial to this work: there was no reason for the narrators to be intimidated by me or feel that I possessed more knowledge. We shared some common ground. Further, many of the narrators explicitly expressed how unappealing my role as a compiler was: transcribing each conversation and organizing their thoughts into concise narratives, was to them. All of them have scientific rather than literary

backgrounds—though Irma studied social sciences—and though they were interested in taking part in the project, they did not necessarily have the time or interest to sit down to compile what they said into a literary document. In this way the partnership worked quite well: they brought the knowledge of their experience, I brought an eye and enthusiasm for structure and organization. As the compiler, I was able to serve as a vehicle and active listener, rather than as an authority figure extracting and interpreting their knowledge.

During the interviews it was important that I let my beliefs be questioned and molded by the narrators. Many times they asked me the goal of the project, to which I responded with some version of “to add your voice to the current discussion surrounding immigration.” I also encouraged that they keep their own goals in mind throughout the process. What they told me did not always fit within my expectations, and the content of the finished testimonios does not consistently align with the political beliefs I held before starting the process. As Veena Das puts it, “I do not break through the resistance of the other. . . . I allow the knowledge of the other to mark me” (qtd. in Puri 71). It was vitally important as a compiler to have interest in learning from the experiential knowledge of the narrators and in letting that knowledge shape my own.

The liberationist pedagogy of Paulo Freire, which debatably developed simultaneously with testimonio, shaped my understanding of the genre, and of my role as a compiler (Blackmer Reyes). Freire argues that when someone of privilege attempts to join “the struggle for liberation,” “they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know” (42). A commitment to trust in the community and in their knowledge is his solution to this risk, which though it sounds straightforward, is not a simple task: “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly (42).

Beyond helping me define my own role in collaboration, Freire's pedagogy helped me see the power of the literary in creating social change through dialogue. It was respect for his ideas which led me to the genre of testimonio originally. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes his theory:

as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, [which] has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation (36).

Testimonio is the vehicle of the first stage, the "unveiling" which occurs in the distribution of the product but also in the process of its creation. "Testimonios often serve as awakenings for tellers and readers alike," (Blackmer Reyes 528) and give the narrators power not only to be actively listened to as individuals and communities, but to call their privileged readers to action. In process and product, narrators of testimonio claim the leadership positions they have historically been denied. This claim is what Freire argues will produce social change:

This then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both (26).

To fully enact this re-centering, intellectuals must listen not in order to affirm their preexisting beliefs, but to re-imagine their understanding of the issue. One goal of testimonio is solidarity, which can be achieved only through an openness on the part of the narrator and compiler alike.

True solidarity and true listening correlate to Freire's understanding of a true word:

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (68).

For testimonio to be successful, the compiler and readership alike cannot listen passively. It is my responsibility as an ally who has formed a relationship of solidarity with the narrators to

advance their struggle. This same responsibility will fall on any reader who truly engages the text. The action inseparably tied to the process of true dialogue is the power of testimonio.

Freire shows us that the re-centering of marginalized stories is important not just as a literary method of introducing different perspectives: but as a way to transform the social structure of the world. This understanding of testimonio gives it an even greater urgency. Not only are these narratives attempting to change the specific systems that limit their communities, but to change the global construction of power. Understanding the importance of such a goal further advances my idea that the risks of collaborative work are far outweighed by the possible benefits. “Denial of communion...is really a fear of freedom” (Freire 110), if we choose to reject collaboration across social identities, we simultaneously give up on the idea that power should not exist in only the hands of a select few. This rejection is much more dangerous than any attempt to engage in dialogue.

C. METHODOLOGY

The following collection of testimonios is narrated by four DREAMers: two college students and two recent graduates. Though in the spirit of testimonio these works hope to in some ways represent the experiences of the DREAMer community, they make no claim to be representative. The four narrators are not a comprehensive scientific sample of the undocumented student population in the United States. All four came here from Mexico and are the oldest children in their families. The following pages are not a project of anthropology or of social science, they are a literary work of testimonio, “both an art and a strategy of subaltern memory” (Beverley “Subalternity” 79). They are not complete representations; I have respected boundaries that the narrators set, rather than try to fill in missing information. For example, I did not include things told to me when the recording was turned off, and I chose to follow each narrator’s personal choices to share what they felt was important and to skip over unimportant or threatening material. I did not fact-check anything within the interviews. First, because in testimonio the compiler should serve as a listener and not the voice of authority. These are their stories and I trust in what they shared. Second, given the opportunity within the editing process, the narrators often corrected themselves. At various stages of the process there would be realizations that time periods or details were not quite accurate, a mark of any storytelling from memory.

I completed the work in Minnesota for two reasons. First, there were significant differences in political climate between Minnesota and Pennsylvania. Second, I grew up in

Minnesota and have a strong network there, which made it much easier to find participants. One of the participants I already knew, and the rest I met through mutual acquaintances or through the immigrant student group NAVIGATE. We met in a range of places, and sometimes through video chat. The process was informal and in many ways inconsistent, which I mention not as an apology, but because I think that the informality was an important part of the process. Certainly it would have been more professionalized or standardizing to meet all the narrators in the same place, with the same amount of privacy. But being flexible about location was the only way to make the meetings possible. Only one narrator had a license, so being able to drive them or meet them where they already were spared them long bus or bike commutes. Moreover, there were gains in abandoning an “ideal-type” standardization or certain kinds of scholarly distance. Informal locations felt more conducive to casual conversation, and seemed to produce less guarded interviews. I enjoyed the time spent picking Irma up from work, meeting Oscar after his conference and grabbing lunch before heading to the beach, comparing Fantasy Football teams with Gus, or seeing Norma in her comfort zone, the gym. Since I am a 21 year old undergraduate myself, Irma, Gus, Norma, and Oscar felt not like research subjects, but like peers. It was easy to relate when talking about school, relationships, and “what we want to be when we grow up.” I often joked to my friends that my research did not feel like a job, but a social life. I think that my age and general lack of professionalism (when I first met Oscar I was wearing workout clothes, slightly sweaty from biking to our meeting spot) helped possibly to make the outcome different, and certainly to rid the process of some of the anxiety.

We followed a loose two-interview process, prefaced with instructions to speak in whichever language they felt most comfortable with. Only one interview took place in Spanish—to provide privacy—so very little translation was involved in this project. For the first meeting I

had a prepared interview guide with standard questions, though we often strayed from it to follow a less structured conversation based on their answers. The second interview was individualized, based on my questions arising out of the first interview and what they felt hadn't been addressed. I transcribed all of the interviews verbatim.

The next step was to take what averaged around 100 pages of transcribed interview per narrator and convert it into a readable written document. In this case that meant shortening it drastically: to around 15 pages. The process was a bit different for each narrator, but I followed certain principles for all of them. I did not standardize the sentences, though I made modifications, specifically to aid in transitions. I identified the themes that recurred throughout one narrator's interview, and shaped the narrative around those that were most prominent. This also included consolidation of repeating ideas to eliminate repetition. It was important to me to eliminate moments where the narrator seemed particularly guarded. If the narrator wanted to keep certain information private I tried to respect that boundary. Some of my questions were ineffective -- either unclear or irrelevant; I removed attempted answers to these as well. The process of compiling the narratives often felt like completing a puzzle: searching for the pieces that fit together to create a whole that I hoped would be satisfying to both the narrators and future readers.

Once I completed a draft of the testimonio, I met with the narrators again so that they could edit them. I told each of them that at this point in the project, they should consider themselves my boss, so that the final product was something they were happy with. They each approached this in a different way. Some wanted their language modified to sound less spoken, and others thought that changing the language would ruin the sincerity. Most of the narrators found that some sentences didn't express exactly what they had meant, and rewrote them. We

discussed what was missing, and if any parts should be removed. I then edited the final drafts to fit what they wanted. Some needed only minor revisions, and others were more drastically changed.

Finally, each narrator read all four testimonios and shared their reactions with me. Though I took vigorous notes during these conversations, I chose not to record them, so that we could be more candid and informal. This step helped me to shape the concluding reflective portion of the project.

PART 2 TESTIMONIOS

A. IRMA

Where I am from, it's not on a map, but if Alaska wasn't there I would be right on the coast of Mexico. It's a town called Culiacán. I remember growing up there and going to school there, but right now I couldn't tell you how to go from our house to our aunt's house, I don't remember much of that. My mom was a social worker, but in the mid-1990s she lost her job. My dad became our sole provider, because even though there were laws to protect against age and gender discrimination, they weren't enforced like they are here. So when my mom was looking for jobs the main questions that employers would ask were, "Are you married?" and "Do you have children?" Obviously my mom was never going to deny us, so they would deny her positions. She tried so hard to get jobs and it was just not successful. We struggled financially for many years. My dad never finished middle school and there were limited opportunities for him to find a job that could support a family of four: my parents, my younger brother, and myself.

Eventually my mom decided that maybe it would be better for us to come here, since our uncle had been in the U.S. for 15 years already, and was a resident through the 1986 Immigration Reform. So we had a connection to the U.S. but we had never really thought about it until things got really rough for us. It was definitely my mom's last resort, she never wanted to move and leave her family. People think that the number one thing we think about when things go wrong in our country is to move, but that is completely not the case. I can definitely say that our family tried everything before making one of the hardest, but best, decisions for our family.

We did it the "legal" way, which I'm really privileged about, because we didn't have to struggle through crossing the border through a river or walking through a desert. The process

took about two years. I think we were denied twice. We had to drive to this small town where they only accept applications certain days of the year. So if we didn't make it during this month, we had to wait many months before we could go again. The process was difficult, because you can get denied for really ridiculous reasons. I remember one time we went and they asked for a receipt of a house payment that we, you know, by mistake didn't bring, and they were like, "Denied."

What you have to prove is that you have enough money to live in Mexico so that they allow you to come as a visitor. People who can't show that have to go through the river or many different ways, so even though we were in a bad place at the time we were able to prove that we had enough money and that we met all these requirements to come as visitors. We crossed the border by driving in 1999: I was nine and my brother was four. A family member who lived by the border picked us up and we crossed in his vehicle to the U.S. They didn't even ask us for Passports and Visas. They must have glanced at them briefly, but it was really quick.

We drove from California all the way to St. James, Minnesota where my uncle was living. He let us stay with him the first few months, but we had been saving for a long time, my mom was definitely prepared. We were only going to stay two years. And thirteen years later...

So my first reaction to St. James was one of excitement since it was my first time seeing snow. I came in December, and I thought it was the best thing ever, until the next year when I realized that this happens every year. I thought Minnesota was beautiful and my whole family thought people were extremely nice. For the first time in our lives we were able to leave the doors in our cars and our house unlocked and we knew nothing was going to happen.

School in the U.S. was very different. I was in fourth grade and I knew no English. I probably only knew “hello” and I thought it was “-ello” because the “h” was silent for me at that time. But I was very eager to learn and I was immediately enrolled in our school’s ESL program. I was taken out of geography and this other class in order to be in it, so to this day I couldn't really tell you where the states are, just because I missed that whole section.

At the time there was a very small Latino population in St. James, maybe 10 or 20%. Now about 52% of the elementary school is Latino. It was hard to make friends because there was a language barrier, so I guess my first group of friends were students that spoke Spanish--a lot of Latinos. That changed as I got older. Some of my Latino friends in high school and middle school were academically driven, but a lot of them weren't. Many of my friends dropped out, or just didn't enjoy school. But I really put time into it and enjoyed it because of my mom. My mom was one of the few in her family to actually go to college, so ever since kindergarten she would push us to do well. In Mexico it's not an ABC system of grading, we get 6-10 and 10 is the best, and my mom always used to say, “*Diez y nueve están bien, pero ocho* is not good.” In high school I started diverging into other groups because I was getting a lot of negative responses from Latinos for doing well and being in theatre and sports. Things like, “You're so white wannabe,” or “You're such a schoolie,” or “You're so white.”

I was really fortunate that in my family school was important, so for me, it was second nature for me to think about college, but I didn't know I could go until literally the last month, May of my senior year. I knew that college was going to be very difficult for me in my situation because I wasn't going to be able to get financial aid. I found out about the DREAM Act in ninth grade. Nobody really told me what it was, nobody really talked about it or mentioned it at all, but I was searching like, “How do you go to college when you don't have a social security number?”

and that's when I found out what the DREAM Act was. So since then I've always known the importance of what that bill could mean to my life.

But obviously it hadn't passed when I was in high school, so I started my research about Gustavus I think in tenth grade. My initial glimpse of Gustavus was through an organization called ChYLI, Chicano Youth Leadership Institute, which was an organization based from Gustavus that would go to towns in Southern Minnesota to meet with Latinos and explain to them what college was, trying to make college more accessible. So through ChYLI I visited campus, and I think that in tenth grade I said that I wanted to go to Gustavus, and I made it very clear to them that, "This is my situation, these are the barriers, could I attend school here?" They were very helpful and two gentlemen worked together for I think a year and a half to try to make sense of my situation. The main and number one barrier was financial aid.

My senior year I turned in my application in September, and it was never a question of being admitted or rejected, it was a question of, how do we do it? There were a lot of issues, they didn't really know how to work around the financial aid or the housing situation. So for that year it was back and forth, "Yes we can do it," and then I would get a call within a month that said, "Actually there's no way, we can't get around this loophole, I'm sorry, we can't have you here," and the next month I would hear, "Oh we will be happy to have you here." So it was an exchange of ups and downs throughout my senior year. Finally in May they were able to come up with a guarantee that I would be able to stay there for four years as long as my mom was able to contribute certain amount of my tuition every year. To this day I'm still not sure as to what exactly they had to go through to keep everything under the rug as you say. Because, I think there were four administrators in the whole school that knew about my situation. I was always

advised not to talk about it and keep it very secretive, just because you don't know what that could stir up with families and administrators.

In college I definitely felt very different from my peers. In St. James, my parents both work in meat-packaging plants as line-workers, and it's a small town, so honestly a lot of people knew my situation. A lot of Latinos work in the factories, some are from Texas, so it could be assumed that they are documented and I guess they could just tell who wasn't. The undocumented employees, at least from what my mom has told me, are quiet, and they're the ones that can get mistreated much more easily. So because a lot of my friends' parents were also working, people would just figure out *si tienes papeles o si no tienes papeles*. But even though it was something they knew, I kept it a secret. I did let people know, but just a few.

Then at Gustavus, I knew I was going to be one of the few people to be undocumented, since at that point they only accepted one or two a year. I couldn't really relate to any talks about FAFSA and stuff like that, although I would attempt to know what that was like, just so that there were no red flags to other people. So I made up this lie that we legalized with the help of my uncle and that we were residents and on our way to becoming citizens. I began that story in middle school and I guess it just followed me to college. I was used to it. I said the reason that we weren't citizens was because it was a long process, which was a pretty good lie since it is accurate, it makes sense. I did this for my own protection, so that people wouldn't ask me more questions. I never really felt like I had to explain all that much when I explained myself that way.

I met the other undocumented person who was the same year as me, and I remember him saying, "Oh yea, I don't have papers" and asking, "How did you become legal?" I said "Oh, through my uncle..." Now it's crazy to think that even when faced with an opportunity to feel

more safe around somebody else that's undocumented, I was still scared of saying it. It does not make sense. You know, you would think you would find something in you to tell you it's ok to say it. But I was so used to not ever talking about it, having it be so shameful that I just never felt that I could, even with somebody that was in the same situation. I eventually told him I was undocumented, it took a couple of days but I knew that we needed each other since no one else could relate to our lives.

I wouldn't really speak about the subject, people knew I was passionate about immigration but they never really connected the dots. I wasn't as open as I am now about being an advocate. I used to do a lot of DREAM Act work in my college, but never to the point where I officially shared my story since it meant I would have had to expose myself somehow, and I wasn't ready for that.

I hit my breaking point in January 2010 when I found out that I couldn't be in the nursing program. I took the two years of requirements, went through the rigorous application process, and I got accepted into the program, but since I didn't have a social security number I had to say I couldn't continue. That rejection was the last straw. Because you're always told, keep doing what you're doing and eventually you'll get rewarded for the hard work that you do. Well, that wasn't the case. So that made me think there's really nothing else I can do: I might as well tell people why I couldn't be a nurse anymore, because people would question and it was hard for me to lie about it since there was no way I wanted to say I didn't want to be a nurse.

So that's when I became more political about it, that's when I took my frustration into telling people to be more organized about it, telling people to care about the DREAM Act, putting my story and truth out there so that others knew my struggle. Initially that was the approach I took, that this was something that was affecting me, therefore if you care about me

you should do something about it. Later on I took the approach of educating people about our current immigrations laws and system, what it was to pass the DREAM Act and immigration reform and why it was important, rather than “do it because I'm affected by it.” But initially, that was my reaction: this is affecting me in a very bad way therefore people should care about it. But then I realized that's not how you change people's minds, especially people who are not on your side to begin with. It's easy to ignore the problem or reject the idea of immigration reform if there's no human face, but once you humanize the “illegals” change can happen. Human compassion is what is needed in this movement and putting yourself at the forefront is the only way to achieve that.

I switched my major to Political Science and Gender/Women Sexuality Studies, with minors in Anthropology and Sociology. At that point, after being rejected, and being close to graduation knowing that I wasn't going to be able to work, I was like, well I really have nothing to lose. I need to not be afraid because really there's nothing else that can happen. I mean it would have been devastating to leave, but at the same time I couldn't do anything here. I started taking more Political Science classes and I started viewing every single class through and immigration lens and how that affected me. So, through that I started becoming more educated about my situation in terms of how political it is. I created events on campus and tried to make change through our Senators and our Representatives rather than just talking about it. I felt like I needed to take more action, especially for the DREAM Act. My attitude changed to, “this is what I need to do,” instead of the negative, “I don't care anymore.” I realized there wasn't going to be any change unless I was part of the movement somehow. I saw that the movement was moving forward but I wasn't a part of it, and I thought, “why am I complaining so much if I'm not putting

myself out there to make something happen?” At the same time there are risks, high risks, involved in speaking out. Being an advocate in many ways is a privilege in itself.

In my senior thesis class I wrote about the undocumented movement and the strategies to enable that movement to progress and be successful. My professor for that class really helped me with the coming out process. At the end of it all my thesis was more than a paper. In many ways that class for me was a space for soul searching and healing. I compared it to the gay rights movement and how that movement was successful, because even though I originally came out as bisexual, I had always viewed it separately. Gustavus is very LGBT friendly, so coming out as bi didn't have that shameful feeling, at least not for me. I started making the connection as I started coming out more, and it was very similar. When you're gay you're in the closet, you lie about your lifestyle, and that's what undocumented people do everyday. So a lot of this became more apparent as I was working on my thesis, but at the same time it's not that I had to do research, the connection was easy to make since I was living it.

One of the big things I found out when comparing the movements was the obvious strategy of coming out as “queer.” It just never really clicked that the LGBT movement was successful in the eighties because people were coming out and once people knew a queer person there was so much more support. It never really clicked that that was a strategy undocumented people had to follow, but at the same time it's different. There are many bad things that can happen to LGBT people, but one of those is not deportation. So the turning point was realizing that I had to not be afraid of getting deported. And then after that I just started coming out like no other. The first few times I couldn't hold my tears, because it was such an emotional thing to say. And now it's still difficult in many ways but it's much more rewarding than I would have ever expected.

I've never had a bad reaction, at least not to my face, not that I would care anyway. I mean really I'm at the point where if immigration is not an important issue to you as my friend then I really don't have anything to speak to you about. You're either with me or you're not, and if you're not I want nothing to do with it. I know there were some conservative people I talked to that do not feel the same way, but I just don't have the time. I have the time to attempt to change minds and listen to the other side, but it's hard to keep friendships with someone who may feel that I don't deserve to be here. You can judge the legality of me coming here and being here without permission, but the fact that you can't see past the law--it wasn't a decision I made. It's difficult to rationalize with people like that, I don't have time for their ignorance.

I applied for Deferred Action on August 17th 2012, two days after they officially began accepting applications on August 15. It was a waiting game from August all the way until November when I first got my work authorization card.

About three years after we got here my parents got divorced, and my brother and I stayed with my mom. We have a good relationship and I think it's gotten better since DACA was passed. DACA has changed a lot of things for my family. For a long time I think all my family was just so frustrated with how undocumented people are seen and treated. Simple things such as driving to the store could cause my mom to have a panic attack when she saw a cop or when a cop would drive near. I don't think people know how stressful and how mentally exhausting it can be. When we started getting our first work authorization cards and social security numbers, I can't even explain how it felt. It was as if a weight had been lifted off of my shoulders that we had been carrying for 12 or 13 years. I felt protected, I felt safe, I felt lighter. That's how I always explain it--I just felt light.

I landed a job as a Legal Assistant for an Employee Law Firm, and it's definitely very new. I feel that I complain less about work than the average person just because I'm very happy to be working for the first time. I hope to always remember that, because for a long time I would always hear my friends complaining about their jobs and I always wanted to say, "At least you can work and you have a social security number!" So now I'm in their same position and I feel very good about it, because not only does that mean that for the first time in my life I'm independent, but it also means that it's helping my family out. My mom really has been my sole provider, so now I feel like I'm repaying all the work that she did.

My parents were part of why I never gave up, because in the back of my head I thought, "If I give up now then why did they come here?" Actually now that I think about it my biggest motivation was the fact that I couldn't let them down, it was a lot of pressure. They gave me so much and I didn't want to make them think that all their struggles were in vain. Also I think I was just stubborn, and I didn't want to think I wasn't worth enough to receive what I had worked hard for. See that's the thing, DREAMers can go in two very opposite ways. It can either be a motivating factor, or it can be...I don't want to say excuse, technically it's not, because it's real, but some people might think there's no way out. For me, I always pushed how far I could go with it. Sometimes I knew the wall would come up sooner than expected, and sometimes I never saw it. I always tried to make myself seem like I wasn't different from my peers. Then you know, I had a really good support system from my family, so it was easy for me to do that, but other people don't. I met a lot of undocumented people in high school that didn't see a point in trying because there wasn't going to be any reward at the end. And that's a valid argument. I know my brother and I handled it very differently, I feel that he saw it more as a disadvantage than I did. "Why am I going to try if there may not be an option for me?" For him it was very

real that it may not happen, and for me it was real that it couldn't happen, but I still always hoped something would change. Fortunately, I was there for my brother which is why he continued.

He'll be attending SDSU in the fall; we both made it.

I feel like I'm more hopeful now than I ever was in my whole entire life. The privilege to know and to plan the future is really a privilege of people who have documents, so I hope myself and other DACA-mented students will have the opportunity to continue past these two years, which I'm pretty sure we will. For a long time I never planned anything, because I knew that either I wasn't going to be able to do it or it just wasn't going to happen. But honestly now that I've been DACA-mented I'm all over the place with options, and I don't feel rushed at this point. I have more options and I feel that things are going to be ok, whereas before I felt pressured to know exactly what I wanted to do because there weren't really many options. Someday I envision doing something that involves healthcare and policy, and I really hope I'm in a position to contribute to National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the biggest Latino organization in the U.S. But for now I feel like I can take my time, breathe. I never used to speak like this, ever, so I feel like DACA has given me more hope for sure. Every day that I have it I feel like things can't really go that wrong, whereas before it was very uncertain. That's really how the life of an undocumented person is, uncertainty to the tenth degree, because you really never know what's going to happen tomorrow.

It's not over, but definitely great things are happening in Minnesota, and it feels good that it's happening in my own home state, and that I was part of the movements in one way or another. When the Prosperity Act was making progress I attended a lot of events and spoke about my story in public places. I don't know how people reacted after hearing my story but it felt

good to know that they could put a face to the issue, instead of people rejecting immigration reform just because they don't believe that those "illegals" can or should have the right to citizenship. When I attended hearings for the Prosperity Act there was a senior in high school who spoke about why it was important for her to have the Act passed. She explained every single feeling I had when I was a senior in high school. Not knowing what you're going to do, knowing that you have the grades to get into the schools that you wanted to get into, but the money was always an issue. It's too late for me, but I can still qualify for its benefits in the future. It makes me feel peace knowing that it's going to help so many people and I'm just happy that they don't have to go through all that mental struggle that I know I did. I'm just really happy that there are DREAMers out there that after this are going to have more hope and won't ever have to worry about what's to come. The opportunities are endless.

Being a DREAMer, you're automatically part of the DREAMer family, so if something great happens to one of us, it feels like it happens to everybody. We all have the same struggle one way or another, you know, it's not the same story but regardless we automatically know how we're feeling with just one glance. I don't have to explain myself being around undocumented people, they just get it and understand. You know how twins can read each other's minds? That's how I feel when I'm in a group of DREAMers, it's very similar to that. We know. Regardless of everything my family and I have been through, my experience is something that I would never change. I just hope that other DREAMers find that, I hope they have the patience to heal from all of the struggles and injustices that we have faced and still face.

You're in such a negative place when you're undocumented that getting out of it could take a long time. Even now I catch myself thinking that I could get deported at any point because I've lived like that for 13 years. It's very hard to get out of the mindset of being scared all the

time, of not being yourself. I would encourage DREAMers to try to heal themselves first, and one way of doing that would be to tell your story to people. For a long time you're hidden, in many ways it's like you're living but you're not, because people don't really know you. For me, more than being in and wanting to be in the movement, it got to the point where I needed to take care of my mental state. Starting to come out really helped heal all the baggage that comes with being undocumented, so I would tell DREAMers to start there. I feel that coming out does change the way you view things, it changes the way you act, it changes the way you feel about being undocumented, and for me that's very important. I think it's being able to be more happy and being able to feel that you have a little bit of your dignity back, that before I feel like I lost. You just don't have it, you know? It's taken away the moment you become undocumented.

I was so ashamed and embarrassed, but now it's one of the first things I say when I meet someone. In many ways it's like I'm reclaiming it, I'm proud about it. And I would say to people like my brother, who are still coming out of that negative place, that I know you're really scared, but if you ever want to not be afraid, we need to tell our stories. If we don't, nothing will be possible for us.

B. GUS

I've known the majority of my life, or, the majority of the time I've been here, which I guess is the majority of my life. I don't remember the exact moment, but I've known since I was little. Because I remember I'd get out of the shower, and the first thing I'd do was put on my shoes in case I had to run. In the back of my head, there was always the thought that something could happen that could chase me away. My parents did a good job...which is kinda ironic now that I'm sharing this...but they did a good job of saying don't tell people that you are, you don't know who's out there and what they might want to do and it's just not something they need to know. So I grew up with a secret, that I guess a lot of people have experienced.

I came to the U.S. in 1994, when I was five years old. My family—so my siblings, my parents, and I—came here on a visa. We flew in an airplane and landed in Chicago where my dad had a job. I don't actually know what the job was, I never asked him...I know he's an architect in Mexico, I wanna say that's what brought him over here but I don't actually know. I vaguely remember being told that we came here for my dad's job, a long, long time ago. I told myself it was true because when people kept asking me, “Why did you come here?” I figured that's the best, most reasonable answer. So, I don't know if it's the truth, I don't know if I made it up.

What I do know is that in Mexico the economy was terrible. People were losing jobs left and right. The *Peso* was losing its value, and schooling in the U.S. is huge. So the job ended and we just stayed a little longer. My aunt called us up about a month later, after my dad's job was over in Chicago. She was already in Minnesota, and she said, “Hey we found you a job, this is a great place to live, you guys should come over here, it's a great lifestyle.” So my parents, knowing how bad the economy and the entire situation in Mexico was, they decided to go for it,

provide their kids with a better lifestyle. So we drove, I think we had two bags maybe, and we drove our little car over here.

I graduated from the University of Minnesota with my Mechanical Engineering Degree, so a Bachelor's of Science in Mechanical Engineering. Both of my parents graduated from college in Mexico, so they were very strict about us going to college and getting a degree. They were very good at showing us how different our life would be with or without it. When you go to a university in the U.S. you can get a job almost anywhere really. So education was the number one priority for my family. Even when I was little when we first got here, it was just in my head. There was no way I was not getting a college degree, especially with all the stuff my parents sacrificed to make sure their kids ended up going to college and getting a degree.

I went to school in Mexico, kinda a preschool, and they taught us very, very little English, but you know I could say cat, dog, and knew what it meant. My first school experience here in the U.S. was in Chicago, but that was very short lived because we were only there a month. When we moved to Minnesota I went to a public school in St. Paul, and I was there for kindergarten. I don't remember any specifics about it, because after that year I went to a different public school, and I was there for a couple of years. I think there, the majority was white. I remember some black kids, I wanna say there was a Native American kid but I don't remember any more Latinos. There were a lot of people who, regardless of their race, got picked on, and there was a lot of bullying for being a Latino, for not knowing English, I guess for being Mexican mainly.

I remember...it's weird, because what I do remember, was how kids would, you know, I didn't really understand a lot of English, but I did understand that certain kids would make fun of

other kids for being in a slower class. And one day, fairly quick after I got there, I realized that I was in the class that the kids were making fun of. So it just kinda hit me, what was going on. I realized that because I didn't know English I was put in the slower class. Fortunately I was pretty good at math so they knew I wasn't dumb. Or slow.

I mostly learned English at school. We had a family friend who would help me with my homework so she taught me quite a bit. And then just watching TV, I watched a lot of TV sometimes and just tried to figure out what was going on. I'd say I picked it up pretty quick, but you know, at that age it's probably one of the best ages to start picking up a language.

My parents had made decisions to tell certain people about our situation and I think they made the right decision. I mean, the person who was helping me learn English, Betty, was one of the people we told and I don't know how much it had to do with that fact, but she helped get me out of public school, get us out of the crappy neighborhood we lived in, into a better neighborhood, better schools. She helped us try to learn the culture of the U.S. To this day we call her pretty much our grandma. I haven't seen my real grandma in years, and she's passed away now, but she didn't really come visit, we couldn't go back over there, both of my parents' moms very very very rarely came up here, maybe total between the two of them like three times the entire time we've been here, so with having a role model like that, because she's an older woman, Betty became like our grandma.

Because of her, from third grade through high school I went to private Catholic schools. I believe my brother, sister, and I were the only Latino kids in our grade school, out of I think 800 kids. It was quite different because even though there weren't many in the public schools I was in, there was more diversity, and the Catholic school was easily 95% white. The teasing didn't

stop, I mean kids are kids. You make fun of someone for whatever. It's easier to make fun of someone who's different, Mexican.

I hated it at first...With time, you kinda get to meet certain people, I made some friends more when I was in 5th grade, so the first couple years kinda sucked. I dunno. Towards the end, you spend six years with the same people, you shy away from making fun of certain people because you're like alright, that's old, over with. So towards the end I think I got a pretty good education, I was a straight A student to the point where I got a B+ on a math test and the teacher took me aside asking if something was wrong. I've always liked sports, so being on a sports team really helped. Especially when you're not horrible, you're actually pretty good at a sport, you start getting more praise from people. So soccer helped, basketball helped.

I remember there's a picture of me holding a soccer ball with a little chocolate gold medal in Mexico. So even when I was in Mexico I was playing soccer, and when I came to the U.S., everything was unfamiliar except for my parents and soccer. Everything was different, the language, the people, the culture. So soccer was one of the few things that stayed consistent early on. Before high school classes started, the soccer season started, and soccer being a world sport, I got to meet other Latinos. Which was, you know, a first in my life, well, a first in my education career. So it was really cool meeting people that kinda had some similar backgrounds to me. They spoke Spanish, had a love for soccer, and were open-minded. High school was a lot better because there really wasn't as much bullying. You know, you watch TV and movies and they say it was a rough time for certain people, but I don't think there was a lot of that at my school. At least not that I saw. I had a lot of friends, there was good diversity, and I still did well in school. I liked High School.

Still, I felt very segregated within the team. People kinda look at you and say, “Oh you're Mexican you must be good at soccer.” A little higher expectation, and early on in my soccer career within the U.S. I was pretty much the only Latino. Also, as you know, some people make fun of soccer in the U.S., they don't think it's a manly sport for some reason. So, it was bittersweet in that sense, because some people would say, “Oh you play soccer you're good at it,” but other people would say “Oh you play soccer. Why don't you play football?” I actually did try to play football for a year. It just wasn't as much fun as I had expected it to be. I loved football, we used to play touch football every recess and it was a blast. But once it became an organized sport, you're not playing the entire game like you are soccer, you have to sit on the sideline.

During that period of being on a mainly white soccer team, because I was so bad with my feelings and I didn't really express them a lot, it was a really good outlet. I mean, I didn't go crazy or get depressed or anything because I was able to just get all that energy out. Then in college and after college when I played soccer I played with a bunch of Latinos and I got to relate to people of my culture.

I was very good at soccer. When I was 12 I was playing the 14 year old team and was the highest scorer, and I got this invitation to play soccer overseas. A bunch of stuff was already paid for and it was this really cool opportunity, but because of my situation, I couldn't leave the country. Well, let me rephrase: because of my situation, if I left the country I wouldn't be able to come back in. Which is something I wasn't going to risk, there was no way I wasn't getting a degree from a university in the U.S.

My situation stopped me very many times, towards the end of high school soccer stuff like that kept coming in, and I got an invitation from Mercedes Benz to go to one of their things in Germany, because I was an aspiring candidate. One of the reasons I became an engineer was

because I loved cars and math so I could not wait to turn 16 and get my drivers license. I turned 16 and I didn't get my drivers license, I'm 23 and still don't have my drivers license. Hopefully that will change very soon, but, that was a big thing. I think the most difficult part about that entire process was people questioning, people wondering why don't you have it, especially when people have to pick you up, drive you around. Living in a suburb didn't help any of that.

Until college, lying was really easy. I grew up with this secret and it was just in my head that there's no way you're telling anyone, and it was really easy for me to lie and keep track of my lies. Maybe it helped that I was kinda smart and good at math, I could keep things straight. I'm really closed off as a person because it was easiest for me to just reject things. I didn't want to get close to people. Lying was one thing, but it was a lot easier if they didn't want to ask you. Then when they would ask I would just brush it off and let them start asking. Because when they ask they're basically feeding you ideas for what they think is probable, and I'd pick the one that made the most sense to me and let that grow within my friends.

So with my license, it was easy, well not easy but not picked at as much in high school because in Mexico you have to be 18 to get your license, so I blamed it on my parents. Then later, I let a lot of my friends think I was really lazy until I told them I couldn't get one because I got pulled over for driving without a license. That was true, which really helped because I was with a friend when it happened and he was able to verify it to people. Then I just exaggerated the outcome. The truth was I went to court and they pardoned me because I was a good kid, but I told people I couldn't get a license until I was 25. So then they would say, "Why don't you get your State I.D.?" And I would just tell them I didn't care about it, or I was too lazy. It got to the point where my friend was like, "I'll pay for your fucking I.D. alright? I'll pay, I'll take you, I'll do everything." I would just brush it off, but clearly they hated me for it. It sucked because you

pissed people off and at the same time you were getting pissed off. But you don't really have another choice, I mean you could tell them the truth but I didn't want to do that.

Towards the end of college I was applying for jobs, and it's really difficult to explain to someone that I'm a Mechanical Engineer, with a degree from the University of Minnesota, I'm bilingual, I've been a straight A student the majority of my life, and I can't get a good job. There weren't enough logical, believable jobs to keep it going for someone like Danny, the first friend I told. He's the type of guy who, if it doesn't make sense, he figures it out. When I told him he said he had his suspicions but didn't want to say anything because he knew not to ask that kind of thing. He was also really confused as to why I didn't just tell him, he thought that since we were really good friends I would just tell him if that was the case. He had a bunch of questions, and I answered them all, and he definitely understood me a lot more, but it didn't really change our relationship. We were close friends to begin with, and he knows my personality is a little bit more closed off, and even if it started off as a front, that's who I am. So it's only changed when we want it to change and we want to have a real talk about it. Other than that it's the same stuff, we give each other the same shit, we still go party, we still talk about engineering geek stuff. It's the same thing.

Engineering wasn't so much a choice as it was just the path I was already walking down. Growing up I was fascinated by everything from Legos to cars, and getting into high school, the classes that were easiest for me were math and science. At the end of high school, talking to friends, they were just like, well, I'm going to do Mechanical Engineering, and I related to those friends and the way that we excelled in certain classes, so it just made sense. Other things did interest me, you know, like, I find Psychology really interesting, I like the idea of helping people.

But it's pretty cool to say, look at where I came from and look at the degree I have. The other things I said that would be kinda cool, like Psychology or Social Work, they're not as impressive. I don't think I thought about it a lot, maybe I did subconsciously, knowing that it's something that people respect.

The summer before college I went to a summer program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), because I had been accepted for the fall. Sometimes I'll tell a story about something that happened at MIT, but I'll stay away from using the name because, people are either impressed and want to know what happened, why I didn't continue on there, and then I have to continue on with the lies I'm trying to avoid, or, I dunno, sometimes I feel like it's bragging almost, I just really don't want to go down that road, but I guess it's a huge point. I was unable to go to one of the most prestigious engineering schools because of my situation.

When I finally got admitted to MIT, the school I really wanted to go to, it ended up costing \$50,000 a year, something we didn't have. The school did a good job providing financial aid to people who needed it, however we didn't want to take that financial aid because of the government thing. When I arrived for the summer I didn't tell anyone my situation, and my dad and I did a lot of discussing as if we were colleagues or business partners, trying to figure out the best strategy. My dad was really my rock through the whole process. I remember he and I talked about what we should do, as far as whether or not to tell MIT, and how to approach that. My first thoughts were, "Let's tell them because if they kick me out I don't feel the pressure of proving that I'm here, because what if I fail," and I just blocked myself off like that. Because I've been doing such a great job of lying my whole life, even though that was my first instinct, my reaction to my dad was, "Let's tell them because if something happens and they kick me out, that's \$150,000 that we lost, if they kick me out after three years." And he thought about it and that

was a pretty convincing argument. But to be honest I think I was just setting up excuses for myself.

So I opened up and talked to a prominent figure at the school, and I think I was one of the first applicants he had met in my situation, because he seemed shocked. When I first told him, he didn't understand. When I explained, he just seemed like, "Oh I didn't...really? And you speak English?" He just really didn't think of that as a possibility, you know, that someone would get into MIT and be in that position. He did a very good job trying to get me to stay, we even sat down with lawyers, and you know, put it all out on the table, but at the end of the day it just didn't work out.

Towards the end when I was, I guess, getting kicked out for lack of better terms, I started thinking you know, maybe it's for the best, I probably wouldn't do so well here, I'm not smart enough to be here. I don't know if I was trying to make myself feel better, or how hard I actually tried because when they said you can't stay, it sucked. I mean, don't get me wrong, I wanted to stay. But there was that little part of me that said, "Well now you don't have to prove yourself."

I don't know if it's me personally or it's something that I developed because of my situation, but it's really easy to use this as an excuse, and I found myself using it as a way to console myself. You know, not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow, if you're going to still see your family, I don't know how realistic it is nowadays, but those were the thoughts in my head when I was little. You get a lot of insecurities, I still find myself feeling really insecure, even with work decisions, really small things. I power through them nowadays because now I understand myself, but I do think that this sort of lifestyle at an early age creates insecurities in the person, that then causes them to, I'm speaking purely on my behalf really, but I guess in general I could definitely see that those insecurities can cause them to use this as an excuse.

Looking around at my siblings, mom, dad, and how incredibly different all our personalities are, how much they range on that spectrum, we all show symptoms of the same kind of insecurities about all this. I see it in other families that have gone through stuff like this too.

So we drove back from MIT, and I went to the University of Minnesota. The first year we took out a loan so it wasn't a big thing, but after that we couldn't keep taking out student loans in my dad's name because he wasn't a student, and we didn't want to do anything to jeopardize any potential opportunity we might have in the future. So my dad made a call to somebody at the University of Minnesota, I met with her, she was very nice, and she introduced me to a couple other people, and these people kinda came together, because my story was just perfect for them. It's what they needed to help open some doors. Here's a Mexican kid who's spent the majority of his life here, has been a very good student, he's getting a Mechanical Engineering degree, and really the only things stopping him from graduating are the financial and status reason, and they kinda go hand in hand. They did a really good job helping me. Whether it was within the system, helping me apply for certain scholarships, or out of the system, one of the people I mentioned needed some work done on his house, and he just invited me, and said, "Have you ever done this before?" and some stuff I had, and some stuff I hadn't. He said, "That's fine, I'll teach you and I'll pay you." So he helped me get through college that way.

The majority of my last two or three years were paid for by a foundation, they gave me a scholarship. I went to this place, met some people who were there for the same reason I was there, and it was basically this lady who was like, "I want to help people in this situation," and everyone gathered around, gave their best pitch, and for one reason or another she decided I was worth investing in.

It was meetings like that where I got to meet other people in my situation. It was bittersweet. It was nice seeing that there were communities where people could help support each other, for people who needed to vent about it or people who had questions about it, where they could go and ask other people, and you know I'd done a lot of this by myself, so a lot of people would ask me questions, and I don't mind helping at all, but it kinda sucked seeing how all these people got together and needed the same thing, they needed money, or they needed, well, it was really just money. And they would bring in this one person, and so all these people would crowd around this one person and have to compete for this money.

I went through a stage early on when I kept getting made fun of for being Mexican and I just didn't want to be Mexican at all. You know, I wanted to push that away so people couldn't make fun of me. And my parents, especially my mom, did a good job of explaining, no, this is who you are, this is why you should be proud, don't let people push you around. But I don't feel Mexican because I don't have the slightest idea of what's going on over there. I could go there and someone could say a word I wouldn't understand even though I speak Spanish, it's just slang that everybody uses and I don't know. I've learned a lot more hanging out with a bunch of other Latinos whether its from work or soccer, like I said, it helped me feel more cultured when I did play in mostly Mexican soccer team in college and after college. I feel very detached from my home country, I don't really feel like it's my country, because even though I was born there, I left it. I don't really, I can't go back, or I haven't been back I should say.

Then the U.S. I just, my whole life they've done such a good job of reminding me that I don't have the same opportunities as other people, I don't feel like I've been accepted I guess. I've never really put this into words, it's really just been feelings, so I might not say things as clearly

as I want to, but I've, I think there might be a song or something, like a man without a country, or a saying. I think a lot of people, or at least I should just speak for myself, I don't really feel like I have a country, or I don't really feel like I know where I'm from. Present day, or if you say present day for the last 18 years, every single one of those days I felt like I was just trying to fit in somewhere.

The entire time I've been in the U.S. I've been told I can't leave. And I know I mentioned that earlier, and I corrected myself by saying, "well I can, I just can't come back." For me, it was more of a definitive you can't leave, because if you leave, you lose everything your parents worked for. I want to travel because even though it's a big country, it still feels like you're caged. Which is really weird now that I think about it because there's so many lifestyles and so many things to see here, but still being told you can't leave here...that's all I want to do now. At the same time there are factors other than trying to break the rules, I guess if you want to think of it that way, or trying to do what people say you can't do. There are other factors like, family, or, even experiencing what my culture really is. Even just to see the world. I get really bothered when people say, "Oh I went to Spain last summer," and they start talking about Spain, or, wherever, just kind of a reminder of, "Don't forget, you have this condition, you're in this situation, you can't do this or that." Just kinda a reminder of who I am to some people in this country. How can I put this in a more elegant way? I'll just say it. I'm not human enough, or I'm not important enough, to have all the same abilities like everyone else has, like travel being one of the things, or driver's license or job or...It just kinda sucks.

I felt like I was different, especially when I was in private school. I mean, people are talking about Spring Break and going to Florida for the week and I was like, "Wow, really? Wow." There was a time where all we ate for an entire month was just beans and tortilla. So to

hear all these people say, "Oh, yea we got a new car." I didn't know people actually did that. I didn't know what a lease was, I just thought having "*un carro del año*" like my mom always said, car of the year, was just something that millionaires did. So it definitely changed the way I saw things. It still changes the way I see things, I still have that. Which might be a good thing, I might live more modestly, but at the same time I'm realizing that it could in a way be self restricting. Because of the lifestyle I've had, I think I've set my sights lower than I should. You know, given everything, with being bilingual, intelligent, having a degree, what I've been aiming for because of what I've seen, is very different from what I could be aiming for, what I see other people aiming for. One of the biggest obstacles you can face is yourself, restricting yourself.

Since I didn't have health insurance and I just don't like doctors to begin with, I just didn't ever go. But, when I didn't have health insurance I went to the doctor in the East Side where people who go there clearly don't have money. A lot of the people were nice but this one doctor didn't understand why I waited so long to go and why I didn't have health insurance. At this point I'd graduated, and I wasn't going to tell her straight up my situation, so she just started treating me like I was stupid. She knew I had a degree in engineering and she didn't understand why I didn't have health insurance so she just kinda took that as, "Oh, you make poor choices." I could tell from the way the conversation went, from the beginning when I first got there being polite to each other, towards the end where she was just like, "You're dumb, you need to make better choices." And it's like, well I can't explain to you why not, and I don't want to explain to you why not, just treat me like a patient.

There have been a lot of times when something happens and I get limited by it, and I get frustrated, and I think, "Ok, as soon as this is taken care of, it's gonna be the best thing ever, I

can just go tell everyone, 'Look at all this shit I had to deal with and put up with, and look at where I am now.'" But right now it's not just me. It's not a secret for myself, it's a secret for my family. I'm not the only person that's affected by it. So, further down the road, if everyone affected by this is "safe," I think it'd be awesome for people to know how far we've come. Even just looking around, our house is huge, and I don't mean in size, but having grown up sharing an attic with another family in a shitty part of town...looking around, it's like holy shit, my parents, coming from nothing, got us a house.

Being in this situation makes it very easy to slowly eat away at yourself, slowly kill yourself. Not suicidal, but to beat yourself down. It's an easy downhill path to depression, because there's nothing you can blame. You have people attacking you, but you're not going to yell at them because they don't know, and they're suffering because of what you're suffering from. You're not going to yell at your parents because they're doing what's best. You can't really yell at the government, I mean there's obviously things they can do that make sense...well you know, there's really no one you can get mad at. So if you don't find the right outlet, you start getting mad at yourself. You realize you're the one doing it. You're the one telling the lies, you're the one pissing off your friends. I didn't want to tell my parents I was getting bullied in school, because they sacrificed so much to bring you here for a better life, so to tell them that your life isn't really better, that it actually really sucks, is to tell them "Hey, you sacrificed everything for nothing."

So you have to find the right outlets. You have to find the right ways to keep enjoying life, the right people, the right activities, the right person who makes you smile. If you don't find a way to survive, your only option is falling over. Even if you're not in my situation, you still need an outlet, otherwise you'll go crazy.

C. NORMA

Until now, nobody has interviewed me to hear my story. Back when I was in middle school people from church were excited to talk with senators from Minnesota, to discuss the possibilities of an immigration reform for Hispanics. However, that meeting never took place, instead a bunch of church members expressed our emotions with each other about how we felt being undocumented people. I told them about how I felt as a student, but nothing ever happened. Now, as a young adult I believe it is good that people know what someone feels like to have lived almost your whole life in the United states, but were born in a different country. Everyone has their own life story, and there are similarities in some peoples' lives and it would be nice for people to be in your shoes and understand what some people go through. Every person goes through different stories, and maybe mine will be something that they never knew.

I was six years old when my family and I moved to the United States. My dad worked in the military and my mother was an administrator in International Business. He earned less money than my mother, and his *machista* view point made him think that migrating to America would give him bigger opportunities. It would make him find a better job to sustain our family. Additionally things in Mexico were not going that great, there was so much crime and delinquency occurring that moving to a different country would be the best option for our family's safety. Once we moved to the Minnesota my mother wasn't able to proceed with her career.

As an immigrant you don't have access to good paying jobs. Usually, the jobs that undocumented Hispanics can get access to are cleaning, food service, or construction. My

mother tried helping my dad the first few years in the USA working in food service jobs.

However, she felt discriminated against and as if all her hard work as a college student was put to trash. She has now dedicated herself in motivating us to become someone in life, to not be pushed down, and to find opportunities for people like us. Her and my father do everything to help us reach our goals, and even with one person working in the family we are able to make it work.

Seeing my mom lose her career and see her depend on my father made me a little bit feminist. I don't think that the man should support you your whole life, but that women also have our own power to follow our dreams. That's why I want to continue my education, I want to make my own decisions. Mexico is very *machista*, so to me it's very important to not have a guy tell me what to do. I want to do my own self, be my own person, and continue my education for my own right.

We moved to a small town north of the Twin Cities, where there aren't many Latinos. I made a best friend, she was the one who invited me to sleepovers and parties, but my culture isn't used to those things, so I couldn't explain it to my mom. So I would get invitations, and since I didn't know English, my mom either, and my dad even less, we didn't have communications really until I was in third grade. ESL and learning English helped a lot. It was difficult because I remember a lot of kids were reading really big books, like Harry Potter, and I was still reading tiny books. It made me feel incapable. I would say, "Mama, my teacher asks me things and I can't communicate well." There were a lot of words I didn't understand, words that most of the kids already knew, like slang.

I joined sports teams when I was eight, gymnastics, swimming, and tae kwon doe. I was involved in a lot of sports and they helped me get to know a lot more people. So at the very least I got to know a circle of friends who did sports with me. I focused on gymnastics, but sometimes I thought it was a little discriminatory. It's very difficult to explain but I'll try. There was a time when I was really sick, but my family came from Mexico to see a big competition. My coach didn't let me compete in the huge event, they put another girl in my spot. And the reason I say it's discriminatory is that there were other times when different girls were sick, or didn't go to practice, but she still let them compete. Then the girls on the team, they said things like "Dirty Sanchez," mean jokes. Or if I didn't know how to say a word, they'd tell me, "Oh no, that's not how you say it," and they'd laugh. They said I was funny, but what they said was funny were my defects of not being able to pronounce words well. I didn't fit in well with them, I was almost in gymnastics just for exercise, not to socialize. That was a little difficult for me because I looked up to them but I didn't feel support from my team. They had their own plans, driving together, sleepovers and stuff like that. But I didn't have my license. Since I couldn't drive I was always with my mom, and that bothered me because I wanted to be independent but that wasn't possible.

Not even my best friend, who was my best friend since second grade knew about my situation, that was the difficult part. So one part I would say it was discriminatory and the other because I wasn't able to tell them something really important about myself. I never told anyone. Now I have found that it's not something that I can hide. In many things people ask me if I have a number, and I've found that I pretty much have to say it so people know more about me, for school and work. But confiding in people, there are so many questions, I get shy about it. My best friends know, one from the church who is also Mexican and has the same problem that I do,

one of my ex-boyfriends knew because I had to tell him about my problems, also my parents' ESL teacher who helped my family for a long time. Then to enroll at the U I had to tell them about my situation.

It was the ESL teacher who told me that I needed to start preparing myself right away for college, and told my dad that I was going to arrive at this step, and that I needed to choose a school, during my senior year. My high school counselor didn't explain to me very well about anything, especially the costs. So once we found out, everything started in the church. I go to a Catholic church, and it's really important to our family because it's where my parents made the friends they truly value, we go to the Spanish mass and most of the people are in the same situation we are. The priest told us, you are Hispanics, choose a school that fits that, for example the University of Saint Thomas. He helped me get a full scholarship to Saint Thomas, but it was for Theology, a major that didn't interest me. I was grateful for the opportunity, but I didn't want to change my major.

I chose the University of Minnesota because I really liked it and also for the cost. It's a public school and the other schools I was looking at were private. Getting accepted was easy, but not the cost. It was very difficult to enroll because they told me that I couldn't pay like a student from here in Minnesota. I've lived here almost my whole life, it's only that I wasn't born here. So they told me I needed to pay like an international student. This was very hard for my parents, because we were way under, but they didn't want to take away the opportunity. My dad worked double shifts to make enough money, and I was able to enroll. He works in a company of tank engineering, very hard work, a lot of physical labor. He works from day until midnight or three a.m., and he's not really old but he's in his 40s, so imagine all of that heaviness on his back from

welding. I want to help him sooner rather than later, so that brings a pressure point, I don't want him to kill himself with all that stuff.

While we were making the college decision, my parents had the option to send me to Mexico, so that I could continue studying there. But what happened was that my mom said, "I know that if you go to Mexico, we're going to see immigration reform." Every time I was inclined to go to Mexico, my dad would say, "Wait, you're going to see, there's going to be a new president." So my plan for the future was basically to have faith that something positive was going to come. I wasn't always so positive though, before college I thought, "Oy no, my friends are going to college and not me." I didn't think I would be able to have a future. I thought I wasn't going to be able to work, wasn't going to be able to move forward in school, that was one of the times I felt really down, not depression, but sadness, powerlessness. I said, "I don't have a future here, what are we doing in a place where we're invisible? I can't drive, I can't work to help my family, I can't travel like the rest of my friends." Now that I am in school, all of that has gone down, I'm in school, I'm enjoying it, and now that I have my work permission and a social security number (through DACA) I feel a bit more like a part of here, I feel more positive about the future. Before I really didn't, because I didn't have access to anything.

I love school a lot but it's really stressful because I have difficult science classes and I have to study a lot. I focus a lot in school. I plan to finish my Bachelor's degree in Biology and proceed to Medical School. My dad and I watch the Discovery Channel a lot and when I was 12 he showed me a surgery and that got me interested in how it would feel to do something that, to be a doctor who changes someone's life. So I started to watch different cases, but what got me

really interested was a show about a little girl who was born completely deformed. I saw how she felt isolated from the world, and that's when I said that this is something that I want to do.

A lot of my motivation comes from my parents. Part of it comes from seeing how my dad works, or really from seeing how he exhausts himself. I want to help my parents when I can so they can have a better future. I want to give them something small for the incredible amount they've done for me, because they've given me so much help, not just financially but support in the form of love, so all the motivation comes from wanting to help them in the future. And not just that but I also want to know what it's like to change peoples' lives in a physical way.

I think I'm more mature than many other college students, because I've already learned to value school. Many people, it's not that they don't take school seriously, but they take it for granted. I feel like the girls here focus more on meeting guys and drinking, I'm not someone like that. I'd be better if I was an old lady from the past, but I feel like you should value yourself as a woman, I see girls aren't like that, they're very liberal and don't think very highly of themselves. I'm not really into parties, because it's hard for me to enjoy something if my parents are paying for my school. I see how difficult it is, to start working in the early morning and not rest until night, to not sleep. So all of that gives me strength to not be a little girl, and to take life seriously.

Freshman year was the time I was struggling because I didn't know if my parents could pay for my tuition. I was really worried about that when I started classes, and I always just sat in the front, and you can't really meet people in the front. Then sophomore year meeting people came more naturally. I started sitting in the middle, and we had labs and group projects, and I started meeting a lot of different people. The friends I have made in college are older, more mature. I've also gotten to meet people from different countries, Hispanic but also Ukrainian, Asian, Indian, and other places. In high school all of my friends were mostly American, so I

couldn't tell them about my traditions and stuff. In college I relate to people from different countries, they kinda know where I came from. Some of the Hispanics are not documented, and they talk about it like it's not a big deal around me, so I feel like I belong there with them, but they don't know about my stories, I keep my things personal. When they tell about it I'm like, "Oh yea, that must be disappointing." I don't tell them, "I know how you feel."

I don't know why they're so open about it, but they're more into the DREAM Act, they do petitions and stuff. Most of them haven't lived in a community where I lived, a white community. They've been in places with more Hispanics who go through the same situation, they've had more friends who were Hispanic. Now with Mexican jokes or stereotypes, I don't take them to the heart, but when I was younger I actually did. That's why I didn't want to show any side of my coming from Mexico and being undocumented, because most of the kids in middle school would say jokes like "did you cross the border?" That was a topic in geography class, they talked and showed like a videotape or something like that about building, um, a border between Mexico and the United States. Then one kid behind me he'd be like, "That's probably how you came through," and stuff like that. So for me I've been hiding that because in the area where I'm from...not anyone is like that.

I'm really really close to my family. I'm with them almost every weekend during school. I'm always with them. Families are important, and they're a big enforcing piece that keeps you up there, because how will you keep going if you don't have your parents to encourage you?

My little brother was born here, and he has my experience and my sister's to show him that there's so many things we couldn't do, and my parents are giving him discipline because he has so many big opportunities. He has help at the dentist because he has citizenship, a passport

for travel, and so many benefits, but right now he still doesn't see them because he's young. He doesn't see that he'll be able to get his license, all of that. My parents understand more about the American culture now that we have been living here for several years. So, they allow my teenage sister to go on sleepovers and to parties with her friends. As for my little brother we still take care, but we are more open to trusting that he will be okay. My siblings are learning from my example, and I push them to work hard so they can do a lot of the things I couldn't, like get scholarships. It makes me so happy that my sister is thinking about a school in New York, when I was her age I didn't think about that, I didn't even think I was going to study in a university here, I didn't know any of that.

I can guarantee you that my brother's going to have different opportunities, he might have a football scholarship, stuff like that, because he's American, at least that's what he tells us. We do keep teaching him Spanish, and we keep up some of the holiday traditions from Mexico, but some of that's been changing. Like we celebrate Thanksgiving, when we got here we never celebrated Thanksgiving, we started when I was in high school. So it's been changing, we celebrate Fourth of July, and when it's September we celebrate Mexico's independence. But, it's kinda been vanishing, or like slowly disappearing because most of the family that we have is in Mexico, and those are the ones that celebrate those traditions. We still do some things, like the parties are typical, but with Christmas, we're more like Santa Claus now. So it's been changing.

I kinda feel different from other Hispanics, they're the ones who tell me that medical school will take too long and cost too much money, they say I'm going to waste my life doing that stuff. I think that comes from the things that have been limited to them. Not all Hispanics but many of them don't have residency so they have limited access to things, and feel like education isn't something for them. But my mom finished her education in Mexico so she has the mentality

of, “Keep on going, you’re going to have more possibilities.” I feel like people who have education motivate their children, but people who feel they don’t have possibilities just say find a job here, make money. That’s kinda like the motto for Mexicans here, come here for a better life, earn money, save it up, and send it to Mexico. But for me, I feel like there’s a lot of things to look forward to, I mean, there’s been a lot of doors that have been closed for me, but I still feel like it’s worth it. Just risk it, go through everything. I didn’t know that the DREAM Act and new laws were coming for us, I mean I knew in the long-term, like 2020 or something like that it would, but it turns out some things have changed to help students. So that just makes me know that sooner or later things are going to get better for me. I don’t think like them because I’ve been here my whole life practically and I feel like I have the right to do a lot of things here. To finish my education, to find a job here, to have a house and family here.

I met my best friend in August 2011, and I told him what happened in my past, with my friends, things that I’ve told you, how people wouldn’t talk to me, what happened in gymnastics, that no one took me seriously, things like that. I didn’t know it, but he wanted to kill himself, and right after I got to college, he told me that I helped save his life. Without having any idea, just telling him my story, he said I helped him understand that he wasn’t the only one like this, that’s different. I know that there are other people who feel low, or bad about themselves, so I would like to tell them that yes they can do it, to have faith and a positive attitude. That they can keep going just like I am. I don’t know what’s going to happen in my future, but I keep thinking that there’s going to be something, something good for me.

D. OSCAR

“You cannot be anything you want to be-but you can be a lot more of who you already are.” -

Tom Rath

It’s a privilege to be undocumented. People ask you to tell your story, and you’re unique, not like everyone else. It’s kinda cool saying, “I might have been born in a different country, and I might not have permanent legal status yet, but I’m in college.” Right? Then by the looks of things I might be getting into the top medical schools in the nation, and it’s cool to say it. Some people might say it’s bragging, but there are certain points when you have the right to brag, it just really depends how you go about it. I say it for other people who are in the same situation I was in a couple years ago, to give my fellow immigrants motivation, and show them that they can get to the point where I’m at, or even a better place. Tell them they’re going to be someone in life. You have to work a little harder, but it’s not impossible. Yea, there are points when I’m like, this is bullshit, why should I have to try harder than other people? It just irritates me that just nine numbers have rejected me from so much. But at the same time, because of this I’ve learned how to go out on my own. If I make a big deal about it, it just makes me have negative thoughts, and it just feels so much better to feel happy!

Not many people can say they took part in getting their own Social Security number. Not many people can say that they took part in filling out the application and making sure it was right for the DACA thing. But I can say that I did. When I found out about DACA I was just ecstatic, and I guess, fortune favored me. I had signed up for Step Up, and they were helping students at my high school land a summer job. So I remember meeting with one of the coordinators in April,

and him telling my sister and me, “I know you guys don't have a social security number, it's going to be a little hard to find a place for you, so there might be a possibility of you guys just being interns without any pay.” We said that was fine and eventually the coordinator contacted me in May, and told me they found this immigration lawyer willing to take me in to do work for him. So when I started working with him, DACA was already rolling in. It was probably like a week after DACA had been initiated, and I had submitted all of my paperwork for it.

I just found it really lucky, and then I also thought to myself, you know, if people were going to be granted a work permit, and being allowed to stay in the United States for two years, they should make the best of it. By that I meant for students, if you want to land a job and you're limited to a job in retail, or in fast food, by all means go for it. But if you can do something more, something that requires more math skills, something like that, do that. And for people who have graduated from high school, I kinda want them to take the opportunity to maybe apply for community college. I guess it's been turning out somewhat like what I wanted, but I also feel like people don't know the privilege they've had. There are some immigrant students that are barely in middle school and they're getting their social security. At that age, I didn't even know what that meant, I don't expect them to understand that right away, but they're not taking full advantage of it. It's not all I've expected of people, but a lot of people have proven to me that they've taken advantage of it.

I guess that ties into what I want to see from my own team of people. Because if you're talking about change, and you're talking about having the right to a social security number, start proving yourself at an early age. If you're a student, prove that you can get all A's, you know, don't prove to others that you can be the one who can dance the best or text the fastest. I always hit myself in the head and tell myself, you shouldn't be controlling other peoples' lives. If it

doesn't turn out like you want it to, just keep going with your own life. There are a lot of things you can't control. But if I do end up being a doctor, that's the kind of thing I would promote, saying keep your culture on a pedestal, keep it all the way up there, and just educate yourself as much as possible. Don't get distracted too much, have fun though. Do have fun.

Coming from low-income, Latino families, my friends and I have noticed prejudice against us, so we know we have to work harder sometimes. We feel that, not only for Latinos, but for minorities in general, when we interact with white people we aren't considered as smart until we prove it. We went to a middle school of predominantly Latino students, and in eighth grade we weren't encouraged to go to some of the best Minneapolis public high schools, we didn't even get all the information about what *were* the best schools. So we had to investigate for ourselves, and I have to admit we were kinda dumb, because we just went where most of our friends were going. So I feel like we weren't getting all the help we needed, especially because we were in a school of dominantly Latino students and it was difficult for some of our teachers to know what to say to us. Like in high school, teachers knew there were a lot of undocumented students at my school, so if the student went up to them and said, "I'm in this situation, I don't have a social security number," they were prepared to hear you say it, but they weren't prepared to know how they could help you.

Towards the end of my sophomore year I wanted to transfer out because there were constant fights, and I felt like the teachers didn't care as much, but they told me I couldn't. Once I stayed, I felt like it was right to stick around. It might not have been the best place, but if I've learned anything from the places I've been, it's really what you make of it. If you're not getting

the proper education, use your spare time to educate yourself. I might have made mistakes choosing the schools I went to, but despite that, I'm still here.

I've always known I was intelligent, I remember teaching myself multiplication the summer after kindergarten. I picked up a calculator, and I remember looking at the little 'x' on the calculator, and doing 1×1 , and I'm like, why isn't it two? I remember starting with ones, 1×3 , 1×4 and grabbing a sheet of paper and writing all the ones, and then I remember if I started adding them it made sense, and I kinda figured out the pattern. Then freshman through junior year, I was above average in terms of academic skills, but I didn't put in the effort, so I missed out in participating in the groups that were available, or even getting A's for that matter. I was admitted into College Possible my junior year, a program that helps low income and minority students to get the resources they need to get to college, and my coach was awesome, and she told me what I needed to do, and I was like, "yea yea yea." Then I realized towards the end of my junior year...oh snaps, I need to make an impression, college is only a year and a half away.

One factor was my friend. He was considered really intelligent, and I considered myself very intelligent, but when I compared myself it was completely different. I was scoring a 20 on my ACT and he was scoring a 28...that's a big difference, you know? And if you were to ask him questions related to Spanish, he could answer them better than I could. I guess I owed my culture something at that point, and I just felt like I was being very selfish. So that was one factor, I felt like I should be more like him. Then once I started thinking about my sister, I wanted to give her inspiration, and play the big brother role. So I had to be a better brother and I had to be a better son too. I felt like I was an adult and I needed to look back at the sacrifices that were made for me and really make those sacrifices count. Looking at my parents, I owed a lot to them. Then I guess part of it too was that I was just tired of being considered a low-income immigrant with no

brighter future. I would get that a lot, there are a lot of people in the world that want to change the achievement gap in Minnesota, they want to see minorities go off to college. Sure some person working at the University could come implement a college prep program, but I wanted to show that we could do it ourselves.

So towards the end of my summer, I went back to my College Possible coach and said, “You know, you said a lot of important things that I should have paid attention to, and I’m sorry I didn’t pay as much attention as I needed to. But I want to work with you.” She’s one of my idols. She’s Latina, and went to my high school too. What impressed me is that six years before me she got a 33 on her ACT, and I was blown out of my mind, because when I was going there, the highest score was 29, and she did it earlier, when a lot of classes weren’t accelerated. And in college she thrived. I mean, she got all 4.0s except for one class. So when she decided she wanted to be a College Possible coach at my school she had the answer to every question we had about financial aid, and if she didn’t have it right at that moment she would have it within a day. She was so resourceful and so knowledgeable and it just made me think if a person like this, within my own ethnic group can do it, I shouldn’t have any limits.

During my senior year I worked two or three times a week at Pizza Hut, I was part of National Honors Society, and I was part of Students in Action, a volunteer group at my school. Then I volunteered every Sunday at Open Arms, a nonprofit organization that cooks and delivers meals for patients with HIV or AIDS. Plus I was taking International Baccalaureate courses and emergency medical responder courses, and I was part of College Possible. It just surprised me that within one year I made enough of a change on my resume to get other people to fund school for me. I feel really fortunate for that. I guess all the sleep deprivation was good enough.

When I was applying for colleges I didn't think much of Augsburg, I kinda wanted to get out of Minneapolis, but financially it was the obvious choice. Once I got here, I was surprised at all the resources they can provide for being such a small school. For example, once I knew I wanted to go to Med School they referred me to the Minnesota's Future Doctors Program, and it's awesome. They have a map of your four undergraduate years, and they pay for your MCAT and the MCAT prep courses. But what really reeled me in was when the program coordinator told me, "Well, we have one student currently at Harvard, and one student at Johns Hopkins." And I'm like what? That's so great. So that's what I'm learning about Augsburg, it's a small community with a lot of resources.

I've always gone to schools where white people are the minority. So going to college, I saw it as a challenge. I knew I would come across a lot of white people who would, you know, maybe be better writers, would have a more extensive vocabulary. That kind of thing. The way I could tackle this challenge was by choosing something that not everyone wants to do, and working with science. Because not everyone wants to do that, and when people hear science, sometimes they think, someone smart is doing it, right? So that's the way I was going to go with it. And also, I didn't want to be too quick to judge. I had heard from other people who had gone on to college, like my College Possible coach, that a lot of people have these assumptions about you. That if you look brown you might be foreign, you might be studying abroad there, or you might need a little bit of extra support. That kind of stuff. Or they don't feel they can have the same conversations with you as they would have with their peers. So I guess I was a little bit prepared for it. There are some students who are willing to talk to a minority in class to work on an assignment, but if you go out of the class it's a little bit different, it's just like a hello, goodbye thing. Trying to engage in a conversation about, you know, why is the grass green? You don't

have something going on like that. That's kinda upsetting to me, but at the same time, it's kinda cool, it's just another challenge. I've tried talking to some people and it hasn't gone so well. But with the people that I have come to be more connected with, it's really rewarding for me.

You have people with religion trying to understand why they're here, and they look to God for answers. You have people in science trying to understand from a different point of view, they're looking at the microscopic level and the cosmos, just trying to understand who they are. Culture is my way to understand who I am...on top of some sciency stuff. I feel like destiny will tell where I want to go, but first, I just feel like I need to understand my culture and that will help everything go the way it's supposed to. I love the United States but I just need to go back to Mexico eventually, because there's something missing. You know, it's just not complete to say I was four years in Mexico, it's almost like missing your mom or dad for me. You just need to see them again. Plus I mean, if I want to work in medicine, I'm going to be working with people who identify me within their own ethnic group. If they come into the hospital and tell me something in Spanish, they tell me something they miss about Ecuador, something like that, if I'm not able to have a conversation about that, I feel that I'm failing as a doctor and as a person of their ethnic group. I don't like to fail a lot.

I was born in Morelos, Mexico, the state I believe south of Mexico City. The city where I was born is called Cuernavaca, and according to Wikipedia it's considered the "city of eternal spring." It's kinda strange because if you left the country before you were five or even at a younger age, most people don't even bother asking you what you remember because they presume that you wouldn't be able to remember it. But, it's like a movie with different clips, where you stop at different points. If people do ask me what I remember of Mexico, I remember

being on a horse when I was two years old, I remember having nightmares about a well, and I remember being stung by a bee when I was four years old. I remember going to school at three years old, walking this little creek. I remember riding in the back of a truck.

I remember walking, leaving Mexico, I guess the city, and next thing you know being in a car crossing the desert, I remember crying. I was forced to be almost under the seat, I don't know why. It was hot, and I didn't know what was going on, and at one point I started crying, so the person driving us across the border opened the door, pulled me out, and just told me to shut up. I remember my father being on the other side, and then him yelling back at the guy that was telling me to shut up. I remember feeling so hopeless. I was crying, and I was crying because I was crying. And I also remember crossing the desert and my dad had this man purse. I remember him dropping it and I remember picking it up and telling him he had dropped it. He said just leave it there. When he said that, it almost made me think, that's not the only thing we're leaving, we're leaving a lot of your cultural practices, a lot of what could have possibly been for me. You know, I was four or five but I was having all these thoughts in my mind.

I don't remember what my parents did in Mexico, but this is what my father told me. My dad used to be a very violent person. Not really towards my family, but he used to like getting in fights a lot. If anybody would insult my mother or us in any way, my dad would be the person to just throw a fist, he's a really good fighter too. So I guess he had problems with people, and I don't know if it was quite because of the fighting, or other purposes, but there were people threatening my father, saying that they wanted to kill him, and things were bad enough as it is in the city, you know, people were asked to leave their territory or they would die. So things were kinda bad and my father just figured it was time to go. I mean, we were about to turn five, and he figured we could start school as early as possible in the United States and we would have a

brighter future. So we came to Minneapolis and for about a year and a half we stayed with my father's sister. It was a big family and my parents, my sister, and me had to share a really small room together.

My father, I admire him so much, because when he crossed the border with my mother, my sister, and me, that wasn't his first time, so the first time he actually crossed the border he was 15. When he got here he took any job he could take, whether that be as a clown, as a waiter, or as a janitor, he'd take any work. He has a lot of skills that just kinda surprise me and he's just been working his way up. I've seen him do work with clients, serving as the manager. He's been either manager or supervisor at the last three jobs he's had, and the only reason he's not been able to maintain those titles is because there have been people who've come in to inspect the workers and make sure they have good social security, and when that comes around my dad always has to leave. That's always been hard on him, knowing that he has all these skills but it's just nine numbers that are keeping him from getting there. In that way I feel like me and him can connect, we know that we have skills to be certain places, and sometimes we've been denied those positions because of those nine numbers. For me that's another motivation to try to educate myself as much as possible, because I don't want to be denied any more things. I feel that I have to constantly shoot for more. I have high expectations with myself.

You hear that a lot of Latino parents are promoting the idea of educating yourself, but it's almost like you're promoting it but you don't expect it to happen. Like if I were to come around you and say instead of talking about what you did yesterday let's talk about the lightest nano-material that's been constructed, they don't want to talk about it, you know? I feel very different, I always want to talk about academic related work, or science stuff. In my group of friends I'm the person who wants to watch *NOVA* all the time. I always want to learn something

new everyday. My friends are very social people, they might want to go to a party but I would prefer just learning something new. This might be kinda bad, but I feel that alcohol consumption is almost part of our culture. You know, there are a lot of Latinos that do a lot of heavy drinking. I'm not a big fanatic of that, though I'm not innocent either. Sometimes I feel excluded because I don't want to do that. And then I'm trying to have a conversation in Spanish with another Mexican person, an Ecuadorian person, someone from El Salvador, and they don't want to, you know?

During my junior year I remember my father asking me a question in Spanish and I tried to construct the response in Spanish, and it just came out wrong. So my dad told me, "*Hijo, tienes que saber hablar español bien, si nacistes en México, tienes toda la obligacion de saber hablar en español. Porque estás en los Estados Unidos no te da una excusa de no hablarlo, y no saber hablarlo bien.*" And that was my cue, oh snaps. So senior year and into the summer I tried to read in Spanish, and I would say I've improved dramatically. People that I know speak Spanish, I just text them in Spanish as much as possible, and they'll text me back in English and I still won't switch back. At home, it's kinda a mixture, sometimes my dad wants to speak English, which is fine by me. Sometimes he'll practice English and I'll answer him in Spanish. It really just depends. My mom is very limited in her English, and my father's is more extensive than hers, but not fluent for sure. I've been impressed with what they can do with their limited English.

My mom will always go the extra mile. She doesn't know how to drive, but she's willing to take seven buses to get to our school events after work. And she's always been my emotional support, my bond with her is just incredible. She might not understand everything I tell her about school, but she's a good listener, she'll listen to you. Then I guess if you're a son sometimes it's

harder to connect with your father and tell him your emotions. It's harder for my dad to tell me that he loves me. He'll show it different ways, like, two weeks ago the seat to my bike got stolen, so I left my bike at home and when I came back there was a new seat there.

At one point my aunt was willing to adopt my sister and me so we could obtain papers, but we didn't want to do that. We didn't want to be away from my mother and father. They were always trying to get us social security numbers from an early age but we would have to sacrifice all that time spent in our childhood for those nine numbers, I dunno, for my sister and me it was much more valuable to be with our family. We figured eventually if we worked hard in school we would get there.

I didn't understand right away what it meant to be undocumented, I mean when you're five years old all you have to do is go to school, come home, play with your friends. I just figured that once I got to a certain age I wouldn't be able to work, but it felt so far away so why should I care? Then around 14 it started hitting me a little bit because I wanted to work at a park board but I couldn't, and most of my friends could but they didn't even apply. That feeling kinda went away, because I figured, you know, I have a lot of time to play soccer, all I really cared about was playing soccer. It just goes back to my junior year all over again, knowing that I would get less financial aid and maybe rejected from some colleges, that's when it started hitting me. It gave me the impression that I should just go to Mexico if people aren't willing to let me into their post-secondary institutions, but I also knew various people who were immigrants at these schools so I knew I would make it.

Once I was accepted into college, it's almost a sense of security. Knowing that you're somebody, you've proven to yourself over the last two years that you can compete at the same level as most students here with a social security number, so why should you fear anything?

Especially if you're contributing to this community. I've done a lot of volunteer work, it's not like I have to get paid to contribute to this community, and yet a lot of people are asking for that, what does that say about some of the people that have current legal status? You know? So I feel like I don't have anything to fear.

My attitude about that started changing towards the end of my junior year, because I knew I was gonna start being active in the community, I knew I was going to start contributing to it, going to start doing positive things. I was above average, I wasn't the stellar student at that point, but still. What reason do you have for me to try to deport me? If you were asking people to try to make this a better nation, I think I'm exactly doing that without those nine digits. So it was just that moment of realization you know, I shouldn't fear anything. If people ask me if I'm undocumented, I'll tell them. If anything, I might be hesitant for my parents. Because I'm not fully sure how they feel about it and I want to respect that. But my sister, I feel like she's in a better place than I am and she shouldn't really have anything to fear either. And then we're just in a time when more people are aware about it. A lot of people are saying there are a lot of undocumented people walking around you, but they're not here for the wrong reasons. So I shouldn't really have anything to fear. If I'm in school, if I'm working right now, if I'm volunteering, I have nothing to fear.

I'm working on a health disparities project that aims to reduce tobacco use among Latino youth, working with parents and the youth themselves. For parents, they talk about how you feel, have you been acculturated, and how your kids live in a different world, trying to teach you some of the values in the United States are different. Like here children are being taught its good to question things that have been implemented for a long time. So if your kids tell you at one point, "Why are you doing this?" Don't take it offensively, it's just something they're being taught in

school. The project is just trying to deal with those issues and in the end trying to build a stronger bond between the parent and their children, so that they can communicate. This is a social science project, the project I was working on earlier this summer was physical science, working in a lab looking at lipid behavior. Just from these two experiences, I've learned that working with humans is just as complicated as working with microscopic things like lipids.

After my undergrad I'm thinking medical school, my top three choices are Harvard, Johns Hopkins, or the U of M TC (University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus). I do need a social security number if I want to continue working in medicine someday, but if you were to ask me if I want it, not so much anymore. You know, I've gotten this far, what else can I continue to do without it? I've grown up to live with this and it's just become part of me, and once I get a social security number it's like changing my identity. It's not like if I get it someday I'll throw it away, but to say that I really want it: not so much.

When people ask me if I'm Mexican, Latino, Hispanic, that's not the best way to ask me who I am. When I identify myself I would really prefer the word immigrant above anything else. Because I share a common experience with a lot of people, and if I were to talk to someone who came from Africa at an early age, we might talk about how we're judged a lot by our parents, you know, why do we talk English so much all the time and that kind of thing. And a lot of times when people in the United States ask you if you're Latino, a lot of people think you're Mexican, and I can see why it is, you know, there's a large Mexican population in the U.S. But I think it's really disrespectful. Sometimes I don't like even saying that I'm Mexican just because I feel like it makes other people feel less because Mexicans are so well known in the United States. Our Latino group at Augsburg took a trip to Chicago, and we had a large group of Latino students

just running in the streets. I remember one student mentioning that everyone is probably thinking this is just a huge group of Mexicans running around but that is not the case, there were two people from El Salvador. I don't know why the people from El Salvador didn't say anything, it might be because they're outnumbered, it might be just because they've gotten used to the fact that people consider them Mexicans, but you have to learn to remind people that they should value themselves, that they're unique in their own way.

Right now not everyone has the opportunities I do and I just feel really grateful. So at a conference with a whole bunch of seniors who want to hear about immigrants who have gone to college, I might tell them what I'm doing to give them motivation, because a lot of people are afraid to tell their stories, and many people aren't aware that someone without documents can go far. But if I were to talk to another person going to a community college who's not doing research for the summer, who has to work at McDonald's or something, I just feel less inclined to tell them. They're working hard too, and sometimes by telling them I just feel like it's a way of saying, you're not as good as me. I don't like that feeling.

One message that I would give to DREAMers is to understand where your parents are coming from if you're having conflicts with them, and if you're getting a better education don't try to outsmart your parents or feel like you're smarter than them in any way, a lot of them were smart enough to bring you to the United States for brighter futures, so you actually owe them a lot.

Then I would say one word. Nova. Many people don't even know what the definition of that is: it's a star that all of the sudden projects a lot of light, and then the light just kinda fades away. The star goes back to it's original brightness. If you know you're working hard, if you know you're meeting the right people, if you're getting the right education, if you're taking all the

courses you want because they're the courses that will take you to the career you want, and you feel like you're on top of it, feel really proud about it. Know that you've worked really hard for it. But if you're going to tell someone, tell someone only for a limited time, and then just bring it down a notch, remember that you're just another person like them. You know, just embrace that you're another human being and find ways to interact with people. As human beings we're all trying to look for happiness. Right? And it's just really nice when you share something simple with someone else. It just makes you remember that you guys are all the same. Just remember where you're coming from. Like for me, I'm an immigrant, but if one day I really do go on to be a really renowned doctor I have to remember that I come from a country that's very poor. I wouldn't be able to stay here in the United States and be working at some large institution and feel happy about it. Help the people where you came from, the people that are where you started. You know? So get full of yourself sometimes, but then remember you're not all that. At the end of this whole life, we're all the same. Remember your roots, and don't get too full of yourself. Just nova, nova.

PART 3 CONCLUSION: RETHINKING THE POLITICAL

I began this thesis due to my own dissatisfaction with both the immigration system in the United States and with its representation in academic and political discourse. Specifically, I hoped that the testimonios of these four students would provide a strong argument for comprehensive immigration reform. Through the process I learned that I needed to shift my narrow, policy-based vision to a broad exploration of “the political.” The narrators, excluding Irma, were not actively interested in influencing policy. Oscar admitted that anything he knew about U.S. politics came from *The Colbert Report*, and Gus mentioned that he hadn’t been aware of the DREAM Act when applying for colleges. I could not claim to be working in collaboration with these narrators while maintaining my original aim for the collection. This realization has led me to reconsider both my definition of the political and the relationship between process and product in academic research.

I quickly discovered that most of the narrators were not interested in politics--at least not politics in the sense of government and the organization of the state. Still, I felt it would be a disservice to claim their aims were not political. This contradiction led me to reconsider my own boundaries of what is and is not political. Though usually attached to discussions of the state and its government policies, “politics” is defined more broadly by the Oxford English Dictionary as “actions concerned with the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority.”

Alicia Schmidt Camacho defines the political in a way that relates more closely to the experiences of the narrators in this collection. She argues that government policy is currently ineffective and excludes the voices of Mexican migrants and that its future successes “will depend on effective witness to migrants’ stories of bereavement and absence” (313). Still, the political value of these stories exists outside of their ability to affect policy:

For migrants, the defense of rights has entailed a renewed search for form—for a politics that might carry forward their desires for justice and preserve the integrity of their communities across the border. The demand for a different framework of governance doubles as a search for political and aesthetic forms that can perform the work of representation in all its senses (12).

Having been excluded from traditional political representation, art forms and storytelling arose as a way for migrants to claim ownership of their experiences. These forms are important not only in their ability to shape popular opinion and policy, but in their creation of a sphere of power for the creators. Defined by their “stateless personhood,” undocumented migrants “like other displaced peoples, continually invent forms of agency within that space of opposition” (302). Art, and specifically narrative, open a space for challenging the invisibility connected to the undocumented status. Though traditionally associated with the distribution and communication of an idea, narrative in this sense can be understood as a tool in valuing and understanding the self: “the narrative act engages language as another terrain of struggle, so that an alternate knowledge of self and way of seeing may emerge” (282). Undocumented migrants are constantly defined by their existence outside of traditional legal and cultural spheres, but in their own narratives they can contest this definition and invent their own understanding of the self. The creation of a narrative allows the speaker to claim power in representing and identifying themselves: a political act.

Understanding the political in this way enabled me to see the importance of this collection to the narrators. They were not uninterested in the political, but as people who had

been systematically excluded by the state it is perhaps not surprising that they did not turn to the state for protection. Still, the arguments for policy reform are present in each testimonio. Reading about the moment Gus is unable to attend MIT, Irma and Norma's uncertainty about their ability to attend college, and Oscar's frustration with his treatment in public schools serve to personalize and strengthen the argument for comprehensive immigration reform. The testimonios function as a counter-argument in the policy debate, though it did not remain the main focus of this collection as I had originally imagined. They demonstrate the narrators' right to space in the United States, and their value to it. Oscar articulates his identity as an ideal citizen in comparison to "real" citizens who possess Social Security Numbers: "I've done a lot of volunteer work, it's not like I have to get paid to contribute to this community, and yet a lot of people are asking for that—what does that say about some of the people that have current legal status?" Oscar and the other narrators do not feel that they should have less access to opportunities than their documented peers. Their testimonios demonstrate their talent and hard work despite the hardships which accompany their undocumented status. In doing so, the testimonios sustain an argument for political change which would offer these narrators and their community the rights of citizenship they have earned.

Initially I imagined that the narrators' motivation for collaborating with me on this work would be to advocate for their rights within the political system. This turned out not to be the case. Irma was the only narrator interested in the traditional forms of activism. Gus and Oscar commented on the impressiveness of Irma's work. Gus mentioned that "it made me feel selfish for not having thought about it," and Oscar said it made him realize that he needs to find out who our policy makers are. Still, they did not feel that hers was the choice they should have made. Gus articulated his belief that commitment to his family was more important to him than

changing policy, and Oscar stated clearly, “She protests, I study.” With this simple statement, Oscar shows his understanding of political action to be much more encompassing than a view that refers directly to government policy: by studying, he is claiming the power traditionally associated with political agency.

The discussion around Irma’s explicit activism points to the different motivations which brought each narrator to the project. Their use of language correlates with how they see themselves and their lack of documents, and leads to how they define the political power of their testimonio. The most common word choice was “situation,” which they all use. Irma is the only one to identify with the more politicized terms, “DREAMer” and “DACA-mented.” This correlates with her seeing herself as part of the larger movement as a political activist. She also takes on a more formal tone: it was clear that she has articulated many of these ideas before. As the process moved forward, I saw how professionally she had behaved during the interviews. Most notably, she looked up in the middle of reading Gus’ testimonio to say, “He’s just fucking swearing!” Irma’s utilization of more formal language exemplifies her understanding of the testimonios as documents with the power to change policy. Though she appreciated that the others spoke to the psychological effects of being undocumented, such reflections did not serve her narrative -- in which she pointedly uses her experience to argue for reform.

Irma and Oscar also use the legal term “undocumented” more comfortably than Gus and Norma, who seemed to explicitly avoid it. Gus used “situation” almost exclusively. He often paused for extended periods of time after a question, as he said he had never articulated such things before. This approach shows that for Gus, finding the words to articulate his experience was a key moment. At that moment, identifying the political was an internal process and also a dialogical one: engaging in the conversation led him to consider how he wanted to communicate

his own experience. It was difficult to examine Norma's word choice, as more than anyone she seems to dance around giving a term, for example: "I wasn't able to tell them something really important about myself. I never told anyone." Even when sharing her story seemed to want to disguise her undocumented status. Oscar said he could tell it was Norma's first time being interviewed, and he felt she could have said more. She told me during the process that she was comfortable with people reading her testimonio because she had been careful to share only things that were real, but not embarrassing, "what people think of me really matters in some ways." By protecting herself, Norma embraced the agency testimonio gave her to define herself with only the details she wanted to include.

Oscar is comfortable saying "undocumented" and identifying as such, but was most likely to use the term "nine numbers" to identify his status. As the only narrator who grew up in an immigrant community, the Social Security Number was likely the most striking (if not only) difference between him and his documented Latino friends. Through this terminology, though he recognizes how influential the nine numbers are; they do not refer to his person, but an object he doesn't possess. With Oscar, there was very little difference between our conversations on and off the record, relating to his comfort with the subject, but also to his audience. His experiences talking about the subject have been with younger DREAMers, to give them advice and motivation. This experience shaped his political intentions in testimoniando: his conversational tone fits his goal of influencing not policymakers, but students. The decisions in tone and terminology made by each narrator reveal their personal motivations for participating in the project.

I did not ask immediately, but I learned why each narrator agreed to participate. Irma was motivated by her political interest. Gus said that he felt selfish, because he was really only

doing it to help with the project. Norma wanted her story to be recorded to share with her family, friends, and possibly with the wider public so that they could understand the hardships she has overcome. Oscar's commitment was to the younger DREAMers, to give advice but mostly to motivate. These goals do not clash with my original intentions, but they are not the goals that first anchored this collection. This required me to understand that the greatest importance of the collection had less to do with my policy aims and more to do with creating a space for solidarity: between narrator, compiler, and readership.

The most powerful moments were those where the narrators discovered that someone else had experienced something that they thought was unique to their own life. "I thought I was the only one," said Irma after reading how Gus used getting pulled over without a license as his excuse for not getting one. She hadn't actually been pulled over, but her cousin vouched for her. She had been sure that she was the only one who had used that story. The isolation created by the undocumented status was a large theme for the narrators and the degree to which they were isolated was much higher than I had expected. Even Irma—who is active in the movement—shared that she didn't have an undocumented community or any close undocumented friends. Oscar, who seemed the least isolated growing up, stressed the isolation of entering a mostly white college community, feeling that white students had no desire to form a real friendship with him. Norma may best exemplify the importance of combating such isolation with the story of her friend who credited conversations with her as the reason he did not commit suicide. The creation of an understanding community—whether made up of two or hundreds of people—may be the most political act for people who spent the majority of their lives practicing silence.

For this reason, small moments like the one between Irma and Gus became important as instances of solidarity. In a different way, the solidarity between the narrators and myself, an

ally, became important to the process. Though I could not provide them Social Security Numbers or college scholarships, I *could* actively listen to their stories. Social change will come from the narrators and their DREAM community. I have no desire to speak or act for them; I have complete confidence in their ability to represent and advocate for themselves. To listen is a small act, but to listen carefully and engage in meaningful conversation is the most important role of an ally in any movement. This was especially clear to me working on this collection, as most of the narrators hadn't been listened to when talking about their undocumented status. For the past year I have struggled with defining my position in this work: as the process concludes, I have realized that my space was small but important. I am a listener. It is my hope that this collection will create a larger network of listeners through its readership. Still, whether this occurs will affect the success of only some dimensions of this work.

The process of creating a work of testimonio (or any work of nonfiction), is as important and possibly more political than the physical manuscript itself. The power of this collection lies in the creation of solidarity within and across communities: between the narrators themselves, between myself and the narrators, and that which I hope will be created between the narrators and a wider audience. In some ways, the product can facilitate this solidarity, but in many ways it is the process itself which does so. By acknowledging the importance of process, I believe this collection argues for the expansion of the defined purpose of research. “[T]he object of scholarship cannot merely be to be right,” (Puri 72) instead, it is important to consider why academic scholarship is being produced and who it is serving. Rather than using the perspectives of the narrators to support my preconceived argument, I recognize the need to let their goals reshape the collection. This manuscript is important not in that it makes new knowledge accessible to experts, but in that it offers the narrators a space to claim political power by

defining their own narratives. If researchers and intellectuals want to serve communities outside of the academy, we should not aim only to be “right,” but to let the voices of our subjects shape our work and its conclusions.

At the end of our last conversation I asked Gus what he thought the collection meant as a whole. He gave me an answer related to the narrators’ experiences as undocumented students in the United States, but I think it also fits the experience of this project: “We’re all saying it can be done. There have been struggles and difficulties, but at the end of the day they didn’t stop us.” His answer refers to the ability of DREAMers to go to college and overcome the system, but the message speaks to something much larger. Whether speaking about comprehensive immigration reform in the United States, new types of collaboration within research, or the creation of an empathetic and equitable global community, it is important that we continue to say that the difficulty did not and will not stop us. To include academia and intellectual pursuits in these fights is in some ways a return to the writings of Marx: “[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Theses on Feuerbach). To change the world, or the systems which govern it, we must begin with dialogue. This project has been my small contribution to such an endeavor.

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