

Interview with
DIANA ESCOBAR

May 9, 2023

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DIANA ESCOBAR

Diana Escobar was interviewed by Caitlinn Grimm on May 9, 2023 at Utah Tech University Library in St. George, Washington County, Utah. She related her story of moving from Colorado to St. George, and her experiences being Hispanic and Catholic in the St. George area. Kathleen Broeder was also present.

CG: Hello, today is May 9th, 2023. This is Caitlinn Grimm and I am interviewing Diana Escobar at Utah Tech University. Diana, can you please state and spell your full name?

DE: Yes. It's Diana B. Escobar. That's D - I - A - N - A. Escobar, E - S - C - O - B - A - R.

CG: Thank you. What languages do you speak?

DE: I speak English and Spanish.

CG: And where were you born?

DE: I was born in Mexico City [Mexico].

CG: Cool. We're just gonna switch to the more longer questions –

DE: Okay.

CG: – now.

DE: No problem.

CG: So, tell me about your childhood and family.

DE: So, like I mentioned, I was born in Mexico City; I grew up in not necessarily – kinda like in the outskirts of the city, but it was at my grandma's house, so we had, it was like a combined family house. So we had my grandma, an aunt, and an uncle with his family, and then we had my family. And while I was living in Mexico, my dad moved to the U.S. when I was five, so between – maybe four, I think actually, I was four when he moved to the U.S. So between four and seven, it was my mom and me, and kinda with the help of other family members. So overall it was a pretty good childhood in Mexico.

When I moved here to the U.S., it was a big change. It was exciting because then I would see my dad, and we would spend more time. ... We moved to Denver, Colorado and I had – it was another combined family situation. So when we first arrived, we lived in a three bedroom apartment with my aunt and uncle and their kids, and then my uncle and his kids, and me, so it was really tight. And I learned the language; I kinda got accustomed to the weather because it was extremely cold rather than Mexico City, and,

you know, made friends and overall it was pretty good I would say. Once I learned English, I was kinda the main translator for my family, so during school I would get pulled out of school and be the mini translator for school and legal things and all that. So that was kinda different for my childhood, 'cause I don't think a lot of people – well, at least non-bilinguals wouldn't have to face that during childhood.

And after that I once, once I went to middle school we moved to St. George, and I've been here since. So now, we do have our own – well, when I came here it was just my family and me, so it was no longer like a combined household, so we got a little more independence and our own rooms, which was nice [chuckles].

CG: Sorry, I missed if you said this, but do you have any siblings?

DE: I do, sorry about that. So, I have a younger sister and an younger brother. I'm the oldest of three. And yeah, my brother now has a kid and is expecting another one, and my little sister, she just graduated from high school. So her and I are ten years apart. So, my brother was also born in Mexico City and then when we got here, my sister was conceived and was born here [laughter]. Yeah.

CG: How was school here?

DE: So, it was very, it was very good. I would say, that's the short answer. When I moved here, well, when I moved to the U.S., I had a lot of support from my teachers and they would pull me out of class during like history time or – I was in third grade – so they would pull me out of class and I had three different teachers that would focus on me, helping me. One for reading and English, one was for writing, and the other one was for pronunciation. And I really – so I was going to an English only school, once I – from third grade to fourth grade, I transitioned to a bilingual school and that made it a little bit easier for me to learn, you know, I was able to learn in Spanish and in English. So, I feel like for third grade I lost a lot of the history of Colorado and whatever was being taught in that grade, I kinda missed out because I was busy learning English, if that makes sense.

And middle school, I was a pretty good student. I tried to be involved as best as I could. I remember my parents didn't really know what steps to take in order to go to college or what – I was getting ready to go into eighth grade, so I feel like at that moment was kinda when parents are starting to talk to their kids more about, "This what you do to go to college; you wanna make sure you get good grades." You know, "We'll look into scholarships, what school do you want to go to?" So, I never had that conversation because my parents never had that experience so they didn't know where to start. So, I remember that we went to, like a family night, that was a college readiness family night and it was all English, so they were just there, but they didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't understand what was happening either, so a nice couple that had served a Christian mission in Ecuador – kinda, I'm assuming as an adult I can probably see that my parents are, like, scratching their heads and not understanding what's happening. So they sat next to them and they started translating to them and explaining what we could do in order to go to college and that became more like a reality. Like wow,

I can actually do this, I can actually think of what I want to be in the future. And after that, we moved to St. George and that was kind of hard because – First of all, in Colorado we don't have intermediate school, so as I went from elementary to middle school, I was in sixth grade so I was excited that by eighth grade, I was going to be the oldest one in my grade and then I was getting ready to go high school right off the bat in ninth grade. And when I got here, I was told I was gonna be in middle school another two years, eighth and ninth grade. So, that kind of sucked –

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: – 'cause I was waiting to be the oldest kid in school and be going off to high school and that didn't happen. So, I struggled to know the right, to have the right friends, I would say. I made some friendships that they were the first people that accepted me, but ... in retrospect, I probably wouldn't have hung out with them, if that makes sense. And I kinda feel like I was – I felt lost most of my middle school experience and when I got to high school, got a little bit better and got more involved. I was part of the rugby club, so I was getting more involved in sports, but in middle school, I didn't know when tryouts were to try out for a different sports, or what clubs, so it was a hard transition, whereas in Colorado I was more involved and I got here, and I didn't really do too much, so yeah. I don't know if that's what you were looking for.

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: I don't know.

CG: So, rugby's an interesting choice, did you continue that into high school?

DE: I started in high school.

CG: Okay.

DE: And when I started going to Utah Tech, I also joined the rugby club and it was really fun. I kinda stopped afterwards just because ... I was doing too much at once. I was working, unfortunately, I had to work a lot because I had to pay for my school. I didn't know – I got a couple scholarships when I first started school, but then I didn't know how to keep it going, so I ended up paying out of pocket for the rest of my college career and still have. So yeah, after that I was working two jobs, at one point was working three, and it was just really hard and I had to make the decision, I either play rugby or I keep working so I can go to school.

CG: How was school here at the university?

DE: It was, it was good. I had friends. At first, the first maybe two semesters, was really fun. I had my friends that had gone to high school, they were also here so we would have a couple classes together or we would meet all and watch TV in the Gardner area. I don't know if the book store's still up there, but we would meet there and kinda hangout.

Eventually, some of those friends started dropping out and I kinda next thing I knew I was just kinda going to class, going to the library and you know, it kinda felt a little lonely, but I tried to include myself in clubs or work, and eventually, I didn't really have a lot of time to be part of those clubs because of work. So, it felt a little lonely, but I was more focused on my education so it was kind of a sacrifice. Okay, do I have fun and live the college experience, or do I survive the college experience? [Coughs]. Yeah.

CG: Okay. So, you talked about when you moved here to St. George, but what brought your family here?

DE: So, my dad, the way that he explains it to me is that: So he was a manager of a restaurant and in the town that we lived in Colorado, it was very small and there was only two ways to get to the interstate and he lived – or he worked at a different town, so he had to take the interstate in order to get to his job. [Clears throat]. Excuse me. And there were the local cops, my dad was getting pulled over a lot, so he struggled to – he started feeling unsafe and he was afraid of what could happen if he got arrested or if his car got towed away or taken away. So looking for our wellbeing, there was an opportunity for him to come to St. George and open up a new restaurant and he jumped on it. And he moved here first and he would drive back and forth during the month to come see us and eventually he thought the move was smarter to come here. And that one was interesting because then he was trying to get a license here so I would spend a lot of time with him at the DMV translating for him, trying to understand how to go around it.

CG: Can you describe some of your favorite religious or cultural traditions you grew up with?

DE: Sure. So, I'm Catholic. I was born and raised Catholic and in Mexico City, we don't really celebrate Christmas. I mean, like we do – I'm sorry, let me back up, so 'cause – [chuckles].

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: So, we don't really celebrate Santa Claus.

CG: Right.

DE: So, we don't have the gifts on December 25th. We celebrate Christmas and we do different traditions, but our gifts, or our opening of gifts is on the day of the three wisemen [Three Kings Day], January 6th. So that one was my favorite as a child, 'cause then I was able to open my gifts and ride around on my bike or whatever I would get. And now, we don't do gifts, we do gifts on December 25th, on Christmas Day, but we still have, what it's called la Rosca de Reyes, which is like the bread that has different like fruit leather on top and we – who ever – it kinda has like stuffed plastic baby Jesus and when you cut a piece of it and if you get baby Jesus, then you are responsible for bringing or making tamales on February 2nd. So that's been a fun one we've done throughout the years, that's something we haven't lost despite being here in the United States. And it's something that I like to bring to work, so every January 6th I take one small one to my

work and then I kinda explain – well, we’ve been working there a long time so they kinda already know and they even ask me like, “Hey, you forgot yesterday it was January 6th, why didn’t you bring one to work?” So – [laughter].

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: So, okay, I’ll bring one the next day, but it’s kinda fun because it’s a way for me to express and share, not only my religion, but my traditions. So, that one’s one of my favorite ones that I can bring out to work and to other friends, and I’ve taught them how to make tamales and it’s a good quality time. And my other one would have to be Christmas, that one hasn’t changed. We still go to Christmas mass on the twenty-fourth at midnight and then we come home and have a really late dinner.

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: Then open gifts up until the twenty-fifth and we party and dance all night, so it’s a fun one.

CG: You mentioned with areyes; is that how you say that?

DE: Rosca de Reyes

CG: Rosca.

DE: Yeah.

CG: Okay, that the person that gets the little baby Jesus is responsible for the tamales February 2nd?

DE: Yeah.

CG: What is the significance of that day?

DE: So that’s El Día De La Candelaria¹ which is, oh my goodness –Which is – I have to look that up.

CG: Okay. We can look it up, that’s okay.

DE: [Laughter].

CG: I was just like, I don’t remember hearing about that one before. So, okay.

DE: My mom would be so disappointed right now. [Laughter].

¹ El Día De La Candelaria is Candlemas, or the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ.

CG: [Laughter]. You said you still do the Christmas mass and stuff, but how have your religious or cultural traditions changed since childhood or since coming to St. George?

DE: So, not so much... well they have changed. I feel like our religious habits have strengthened since we moved to St. George. One thing is that, I had never been asked what religion I was until I moved here. Or what ward I belonged to. So, I kinda had to learn the LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] lingo, you know. So I didn't – it kinda made me feel weird. I didn't know why people would ask me my religious affiliation. I didn't understand why it was important until I learned the culture here and learned that well – I guess, I learned quickly once I said I'm not LDS and I learned how some people looked at me differently or I wasn't included or certain phrases that I would say that I wasn't part of it. So, I learned, and my family did too, that we kinda had to represent our religious beliefs stronger and be better. If that makes sense. I went on a Catholic mission and every time that I mention that I went on a mission, I make sure I say I went on a Catholic mission to not get confused with going to an LDS mission. And I see the difference because sometimes I do it as a little experiment–

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: – and I like to play with people. And I talk, “Oh yeah, I went on a mission.” “Oh, really where'd you go? I went here and I went to, you know, Brazil.” And I tell them I went on a Catholic mission, once I mention to them that I went on a Catholic mission, I know that they are trying hard to not like – I don't know how to explain it. There's a shift in their attitude that I can see, and it's like, “Oh, I didn't know Catholics went on a mission?” So then it's kinda an opportunity for me to say, “Well, yeah, you know? Christians do too, and other people go on missions. It's not just LDS people that go on missions.”

CG: [Chuckles]. Mm-hmm.

DE: So, I've really tried to be a good Catholic in the sense of represent–, because okay – what am I trying to say? I feel like there's this stigma that LDS people don't swear, you know, don't drink coffee, don't do a lot of things that sometimes put them in a better than thou and then here I am, who drinks coffee, who, you know, says a swear word here or there, who has tattoos, and they look at me and they're like, “You're Catholic?” So, I feel there's this – I feel judged and I feel – but at the same time I kinda try to not feel – to also feel like I'm a good person, not just because I'm not part of what you believe, doesn't mean that I'm less than or that I don't have a strong love for God, if that makes sense.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: So, when people pray and bless their food, I make sure that I do the sign of the cross and that I pray however I wanna pray because I – we're not used to crossing our arms and looking down and closing our eyes. There's nothing wrong with that, but I can distinctly see who has been raised as an LDS person even if they're non-practicing and who hasn't. So, in a way it's kind of like an unspoken thing that I do, and that my family does, that

when we pray, so yeah, we bow our heads or – but, I keep my eyes open or I do the sign of the cross. And I don't know, maybe it sounds rebellious –

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: – but it's what makes me feel better, it's what makes me feel me. I forgot your question, I'm so sorry.

CG: It's okay. How have your cultural or religious traditions changed since –

DE: Oh!

CG: – coming here?

DE: Yeah, so going back to that. I think if I was in a different state, like if I was back in Colorado, I don't even think that would cross my mind, you know. I don't think that I would have to worry about that because everyone was different. I went to school with people that were Jewish, that were Buddhist, that were Christian, that were Catholic. I honestly don't know if I ever went to school with a Mormon kid. So yeah, it was very different and I feel a sense of responsibility to represent a good Catholic, I guess I would say, to not be judged by – I don't know how to explain it. I think I'll just leave it at that.

CG: Okay. You touched on this a bit; but what has your experience been with the broader St. George community?

DE: I think St. George is growing a lot and there's lots of diversity and, honestly, I love it. It's been – well, when I first moved here, I kinda cried, well, I was a teenager, so I kinda cried my whole way from Denver to St. George because I was moving away to a place I didn't know.

CG: [Laughter].

DE: Once we drove down the fifteen and I looked at the mall, I started balling even harder.

CG: [Laughter].

DE: Because, I was like, “What is this? This is not a mall, this is a three store building.” So I kinda get excited that it's growing and that we have more variety in food and places to be at, but also in the different faces that we get to see and it's a good change I think. I think everyone needs to be exposed to that and I think that St. George was not exposed to that. Even in my classes when I was going to college, I was probably one of the first – so, I went to school kinda like at different times, I went to school when I first went out of high school, then I took a break 'cause then I went on my mission, then I came back and I got married and my husband was going to college, and then I went back and I started doing online. So, I've kinda been at different times, I was there when it was still Dixie College, when it was Dixie University, and now where it's been Utah Tech. So, ten years ago, I

was probably the only visibly Hispanic, by that I mean, like the only brown skinned girl in my classes. And once in a while, I would see maybe two, it would be me and someone else, but for the most part I was the only one there. So, now I can't even imagine what, and I hope that the classrooms look different, now. So, having that exposure to different cultures and points of view, I think that is, I think that is really good.

CG: What are your thoughts on the Latino-Hispanic community?

DE: I think that we need passionate people that truly care about our community to provide resources. I would have to say that I feel like there's a lot of resources out there. And I work for USU [Utah State University] extension, and all of the programs that we offer are amazing and I just think, "Wow, I would love for this article to be in Spanish, and I would love for these classes to be available in Spanish." Because, you know, people learn English, but especially when I see my parents, I'm like, I know that they could – and they have attended different classes, but it's not the same. There's different words that are not, especially once you get into education, that they don't understand and being able to understand that in their own language would be such a good thing for them because then they're working on healthy relationships within their homes, which that nurtures and helps their kids to be out there and be better citizens. So I think that our Hispanic community is growing as well, but I think there's also a lack of resources available for my community.

CG: How would you describe your relationship with white Americans? Like, not necessarily LDS, but just in general.

DE: I think overall it's pretty good. You know, you always encounter, I feel... my relationship with white Americans, the ones that I am friends with and the ones that I know, are amazing people. My favorite – and the reason why they're my friends is because even though sometimes they don't know how to approach a situation or they don't know about my culture or about my own experiences, they're always open to listening.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: And they ask questions, and they're not afraid to say the wrong thing. And those are the people that I am friends with and those are the people that I am proud to call family. Truly. [Emotional] Good thing you have these [indicating tissues] [laughter].

CG: We can pause if you need a moment.

DE: Sorry.

CG: It's okay.

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

DE: There's nothing better than to feel seen and empowered by people that you don't know, by people that don't know your struggles. [Emotional] I've encountered people that they're ignorant and choose to remain ignorant. But my friends, my white American friends, at one point or maybe in a couple things related to the Hispanic community, have been ignorant, but have also been open to put themselves in my position and... just kinda like, even something like saying something like, "Wow. That must be really hard," makes such a difference. Feeling like your experiences are valid, your emotions, your struggles, having people that you know that will defend you and will stand by your side is such a blessing.

And so to answer your question, how do I feel about white Americans? You know, I hope that people can be open to understanding different situations, you know. Like I said, in fifth grade I was translating for my parents for how to pay bills to attorneys to calling the doctors and making doctor's appointments, dentist appointments, learning about insurance. In fifth grade, I must have been ten if that, and that's not, you know, that's not something that a child not necessarily needs to go through 'cause it's like a super hardship, it's not like a big hardship, but that's not something that a child is exposed to all the time. But it was my reality and I know that it was a reality for a lot of Hispanic first-generation families and sometimes there were – I was kinda part of the – I was one of the adults, so I knew our financial situation, not by choice, but because I had to call the credit card company or I had to call the bank and that kinda weighs down on a kid like to know, "Oh, I can't ask to be part of the soccer team because I know my parents are struggling financially." Or, "I wanna go to my friend's party, but I know that my dad doesn't have gas today." You know, things like that, it's a stress that you kind of get put on. And it's not my parents' fault, it was just the way that it had to be because they didn't have resources. They didn't know the language so they had to go to their next best option and that was me. [Whispering] I forgot your question.

CG: [Whispering] it's okay.

DE: [Chuckles].

CG: So, you mentioned resources again, and that you wished your work had more Spanish available resources. Can you tell me more about your work?

DE: Yeah, so, USU extension offers research based community or researched based resources for the community. So, what that means is that they – so extension, every county has an extension and almost every part of the country. It's through, one of those big universities. I forgot what the grant that it's called – [coughs] but excuse me, sorry. But they have different programs, so they have different – it's kinda complex, but basically what they have is how to help the community be self-sufficient. So, they have healthy relationships, which focuses on parenthood, couples relationships, parenting kinda like the love and logic courses. They have gardening classes, cooking, sewing classes, so it's kinda teaching, so the goal is teaching the community basic skills so they can be self-sufficient. So, a lot of those things, I wish they were available in Spanish. They are making changes, there are a couple, [coughs] for instance, their nutrition program is [coughs] their

nutrition program is in Spanish or is more available in Spanish, and but I think the reason why is because they actually have someone that does speak Spanish. So, that is someone that is the face of that program or in that county that can teach Spanish classes. So, I, you know, I wanna be that person that can be the face of a resource that is available for people. At the moment, I am not, I'm still going to school, but that is my goal. And USU extension is open and sees the need to fulfill that need not only in the community, not only in Washington County, but all over the state.

CG: That's cool. Thank you.

DE: [Coughs].

CG: You okay?

DE: Yes.

CG: So, switching gears a little bit. How has the area changed since you've been here? Like you mentioned growth and you're excited maybe for more stores, but [laughter] –.

DE: [Chuckles]. How has the area changed? [Pause]. I think... that's a good question. Well, I think it has, economically it has grown a lot. One thing that I wish we had was available housing for – especially, for lower income families. That is one thing that now-a-days, not even myself I can afford. So the growth is good and the diversity that growth brings, but it also, and I don't know really economic development speaking, I don't know any of that, but it's almost – It questions me a little bit and I think like it's a touristy area where a lot of my community works in hotels and service, but we can't live here. So, it's frustrating and it's depressing because, you know, if they – if we want our town to thrive, we also need people that can work it, and the people that can work it, can't live here. So, it's changed in that sense. When we first moved here, we moved here because it was affordable and we saw a bright future because it was growing, but now it continues to grow and it kinda seems like, it questions me, if I will be able to live here in the next five, ten years.

CG: What changes have you noticed with the Latino-Hispanic community here, if any?

DE: Well, one thing that I've recently learned is the Suazo Business Center that I think it's over at the [Atwood] Innovation Plaza, and so with growth it brings more opportunity to my Latino and Hispanic community. So, I've noticed that there's also people whether they're first generation or maybe their kids have now gotten education or themselves, you know, parents have gotten more education or that thrive and motivation to think that they're also able to have the same opportunities as anyone else here, so they can start their own business. And I've seen it first hand with people that I know that have started their own cleaning business, you know, their own taco truck, they've gone from those kinds of jobs to other different things. And I really like that someone saw that need that we needed for business-starters, especially Hispanic and Latinos, that also wanna thrive,

you know? This is the land of opportunity, so why not bring those opportunities in their language in ways that they can also understand it? I think that's awesome.

CG: Is there anything else you can think of that's changed?

DE: I guess, I've also, speaking from my own experience, I have also noticed that are bilingual. So, for instance, at my job, I'm that person that speaks Spanish, so I can translate for them and I can... where ten, fifteen years ago, my parents if they wanted to go somewhere, they had to take me. But now there's someone there that speaks the language. So, that is also good. Yeah. I don't know. Yeah.

CG: I think we just have a couple more questions –

DE: Sure.

CG: – that unfortunately don't go together [Laughter] but–

DE: That's alright.

CG: Have you– you mentioned ignorant white people earlier. Have you experienced racist or prejudiced behavior? And what was that like?

DE: Yes. Unfortunately, more than I would want to. One of my experiences – one of my first experiences was when I moved here in eighth grade and that was about the time where Obama was getting elected, so you know comments from kids that I would hear, and teachers, that would say like, “Well, if he gets elected I'm moving to Canada or I'm moving somewhere else.” And as a child, I didn't really understand. I was like, “What's the big deal?” Why would you wanna move somewhere else? I've already moved before and it's terrible, so why would you wanna move to a different country? And then I got kind of angry 'cause I was like, “You're so ungrateful. I moved here from a different country because of something, because of poverty, because of – I did not have anything, any type of experience or opportunity that I have here, and you wanna move because your president is Black? Or because, you know, he is a Democrat?” And in one of those classes, it kinda, I got to encounter kids that would make – like the comments started getting meaner and you know, saying things like, “I don't speak Mexican” or “You should go back to your country,” you know, all those slurs that I didn't know what they meant until heard them, and I was like, “Oh? Those are directed at me?” [chuckles]. So at the moment, you don't really know what to do and I still feel like it catches me by surprise when I hear certain things, because you feel powerless and you feel like you're the minority – you're literally the minority there, so it's kinda like, all these people are against me and you're – I was afraid to react a certain way.

In college, I had – I was taking a political science class and we talked about, after every chapter, we would talk – we would have debates and we got to the immigration debate. And it was me and another girl, that we were Hispanic, and we talked about it, and she expressed to me how nervous she was, and she was like, “I don't want to go to class. It's

going to get ugly. I don't wanna go." And I was like, "No, we have to stick together. We have to go and we have to give our – we have to make our voices heard." So that day came, she didn't show up. So, I was like, "Oh, great." So, now it's me and I was like, "How bad can it be?" That day, I cried a lot because people were expressing themselves and the way that it started was very mild, as like, "Well, you know, I don't think people should – I'm okay if people come here if they do it the legal way." Which is kinda, a phrase that I've heard over and over again. And in my mind, I'm thinking, "You don't get it. It's not that easy. You don't understand that I can wait fifteen years or however long to come here. You don't get it."

So as the class progressed and the comments started to get a little heated, there's this kid that – you know, everyone kinda gave their two cents on how they felt. Most of them were against immigration. And we come to this kid and he's like, "Well, I'm on the fence. I don't really know how I feel. I think everyone should be welcome and everyone should be included, so you know. But I also think they should do it legally, so I don't know." So, my professor asked, "Okay, so, how would you feel if an immigrant worked at a restaurant? Would you be okay with that?" and he said, "Yeah, I would be okay with that, you know –" Oh, because he said that he wasn't okay with immigrants stealing jobs. So, the professor, once he asked if it was okay for an immigrant to work at a restaurant, he was like, "Yeah, I'm okay with that." So, he was like, "Okay, how would you feel if an immigrant was a doctor or a lawyer?" And he's like, "That's not right, he's stealing a job." And [laughter] that broke me, and till this day [emotional] I think about it, and it hurts me because here I am, an immigrant, going to school... to have a better life than my parents that clean houses, that work at a restaurant, that work construction, and someone is saying that I am stealing a job where I can make lives better not only for my community, but for everyone else. And that was just – that was just heartbreaking to know what being off the fence sounded like, and I couldn't say anything. I stayed quiet and I ran to the bathroom, and I called my friend that was in that class, and I just started crying. I [emotional] I didn't have a voice. I didn't have a voice. I felt like I didn't really have anyone in my corner and I felt like all of the – all of my classmates were against me because, truthfully, me being an immigrant, and the way they had expressed themselves were against it. So I was no longer a person. I was an immigrant who was stealing jobs, and selling dope, and being that stereotypical immigrant that everyone – well, I shouldn't say everyone – but that stereotypical immigrant that is very much disliked. And that was here; that was here at Dixie [Utah Tech]. And I just felt – I kinda felt hopeless. I kinda felt like how is this possible. How, the irresponsibility of this professor to not go more in depth. He eventually gave his opinion and said that he was for it, but not for the right reasons, just because economically, bringing in more immigrants and more people was always good for the economy. I was like, "Okay, alright." I guess this is what it's like to live in America.

As I grew older, I realized that – I've met, like I've said, some great white American people that I love dearly, that I know they're not like that. And but, you know, here and there now in the professional setting, you get a couple microaggressions and the typical, "Oh, my gosh, you're so exotic!" or "Oh, my gosh, you have beautiful skin tone. You have beautiful skin. Where are you from? Because you speak English so well" or "I can't

even hear an accent” or, you know, those little comments here and there, that I’ve kind of learned to just – It’s usually older white people [laughter]. Probably like after like sixty and over that I’ve kinda heard those comments, and I think part of it could be generational and ignorance for sure. So I kind of like, “Oh, okay, well, yeah. Thank you, I’ve work hard to get this skin –”

CG: [Laughter].

DE: “– color, I guess.” So, yeah, it’s kinda like, you – I kinda learned to identify those comments, but I also don’t let them get to me, and I try not to judge them because maybe they don’t have, they haven’t been exposed. You know, just because you have one Black friend or one Hispanic friend, doesn’t mean you already know all of the struggles and know, and you’re already not racist because of that, so I – If the person is open to learning, then I’m more than happy to explain and share my personal experience, and if they’re not, then I just don’t. I put my distance.

CG: Thank you for sharing that. I was wondering if you could talk more about your mission so we know how it’s different from LDS missions.

DE: Yeah. Yeah, so I – my mission kinda started like, oh, I – it wasn’t expected. My Catholic mission was not something, it’s part of – Like, you know, how like with LDS it’s kinda expected. You graduate and then you – some people do their mission, some people don’t, but it’s more people that do them rather than not. Here I actually, I didn’t know there were Catholic missions until in my church, we had Catholic missionaries. They invited me to a retreat and see if I would like it, I said no because I already had a notion of what missionaries, and returning missionaries looked like, so I was like, nope, I don’t wanna do that. A couple years passed, and I had that kinda like – it sounds cliché, but I truly did – I had that kinda void in my heart, that I needed a change. I needed to feel closer to God, and I didn’t really know how to do it here, because in our Catholic church there is also differences from being in Utah to being in a different state.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: In Colorado, there was a bunch of activities and it was very diverse. And here, it was less diverse, and there’s less like – what are they called? Less ministries or less groups, so and there’s kinda also a division, too, between the Spanish mass and the English mass. I go to both because I, in my mind, I think maybe I can bridge that gap, right? So, I go to both. But so, I didn’t want to go. Eventually, once I was in college and I felt like I needed, I wanted to have a more personal relationship with God. I decided I wanted to go, and it is for a year and eight months.

So, the first eight months, you go to a place in California. It’s like a big ranch and you prepare yourself for eight months. Then after that you can either decide that you’re going – well, the goal is always to continue and do your mission, but you can decide to leave and go back home or continue your mission. And the mission is for a year, and you can continue to renew another or you can go home. And when I was there in California, I met

lots of different people. It was only in Spanish because the... oh my gosh, I can't think of the words. It's not the organization –

[RECORDER PAUSED.]

CG: Okay, so we're talking about your mission. And the order was in Spanish, only?

DE: Yes. So, it's called Missionary Servants of the Word in English, but in Spanish it is Misioneros Servidores de la Palabra. It was founded by an Italian priest and he fell in love with the Mexican people and he wanted to start this order where young adults served their mission, and they got a formation, preparation and then went off to different places in the county and served. And that was like seventy years ago, and now it's expanded to the U.S. and different parts of other countries. So, since he started it in Spanish almost [building announcement on intercom] everything was in Spanish and his idea was to target the Latino-Hispanic community, so that's how I found them, they were serving here in St. George. And when I decided to go on my mission, all of the – everything, I mean everything, everything was in Spanish. So that was kinda fun, because I've never been, since I was in Mexico going to school –

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: – I had never had 24/7 Spanish.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: So, it was super cool. I served in California, which I had never been to, and I served in a little town in Riverside area and east L.A. [Los Angeles] and Compton. So, it was a culture shock as well, because I had never been to those places and I had never been to more like rougher areas that, you know, it was very different. The first day I got to Compton someone had gotten into the convent where we were staying in and robbed the place and took everything, so we didn't really have a place to stay. There was drive-bys by the church. Not that often, but they were scary. In east L.A. there were parts that the streets had been closed down because they were looking for someone that was at-large, so that was really scary and I felt grateful for being in St. George. Nice, quiet, St. George, Utah. But it also taught me a lot, and I got to meet all of my – more people with different walks of life and I got to see how, you know, even though we are in the same country, just the difference of different geography and the different needs that communities have. But, I also did see that one of the biggest things that all those communities have, when it comes to socioeconomic status, is the lack of, I'm gonna say, resources again [laughter]. So, but it was overall, that was kinda like, I mentioned those things to kinda give a bigger picture of how it was sometimes, but it wasn't like that all the time. Most of the time, it was a beautiful day where I got to see all kinds of fruits, and, at people's yards were front yards, and I got to party a lot in the sense of – [laughter].

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: – because I was in east LA, I mean, I hardly spoke English at all in that little part of L.A. because it's prominently Spanish, and us Hispanics like to have lots of parties.

CG: [Laughter].

DE: We ate a lot. I gained weight, a lot. [Laughter].

CG: [Laughter].

DE: [Laughter]. But, I also had the opportunity to meet some great families that opened their doors to us. So after my year and eight months – so during that time, it was a discernment for me and what vocation I wanted to have. Meaning, in the Catholic religion, we believe in three different vocations, which is the single, married life, or religious life. So I kinda had that opportunity to discern where I was meant to be. Whether I was going to be single, or married, or if I was going to become a nun. And for a very long time, most of my mission, I considered being a nun, and I was excited and I wanted to be, but at the same time, it was kinda for the wrong reasons. I wanted to be a nun because I thought that was easier.

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: 'Cause I was like, you know, I get to be praying with God all day, and then I don't have to face the real world. I don't have to face the hardships that people go through financially and I was kind of excited for the wrong reasons. So, I kinda had to take a hard look at myself and realize that that's not where I was supposed to be and I left my mission and I still wasn't sure if I was going to be married or be single, but I was open to both of them. Eventually, after lots of prayer, I decided I wanted to be married. I didn't know to who, but I wanted to be married.

CG: What was kind of like your everyday schedule or duties like during your mission?

DE: So, during my eight months of formation, we would get up at five-thirty, then be at the chapel by six. So we would pray. We have it called, like, prayer hours, so every hour there's a special prayer that you say. So we would first say the [???Laudates???], which is in the morning, so we would say our morning prayers. Then sometimes we would have either mass in the morning or in the evenings, and after that we would all have different assignments. I was in a Co-ed space, so the sisters, which were the missionary sisters, would sleep on one side of the ranch and the brothers would sleep on the other side, the opposite end of the ranch, but we would all take classes and have activities together, so –. And they were led, the brothers were led by priests, the sisters were led by nuns. So the nuns kind of, every week we would have different assignments and they would say, "Okay, you three, you're in charge of the kitchen. You three are in charge of working the garden. You three are in charge of cleaning the church." So, we would rotate and we would, if it was your turn to be in the kitchen then you had to plan meals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And it was fun. I mean, it was a lot of work because we were cooking for quite a bit of people, probably sixty people every single day. So it was hard work, but

it was also fun. And we would do – we would maintain our space clean so, but, in between we would pray. So, at noon we would pray the Angelus and then after that, once we were done with our cleaning duties, we would go get ready and be ready for what would be like lunch, but it was a late lunch so we would eat around two, and then we have class. Then we would finish the rest of our night with dinner, pray the rosary, and with our night prayer. And we would do that Monday through Friday.

On the weekends, we would separate and we would all go to different places. Sometimes we would go out of state, and we would practice being missionaries. So, we would go door to door or we would do different community service depending in different cities, so I got to see a lot of different parts of California because of that, 'cause every weekend we were in Southern California, but sometimes we would go to Sacramento or we go to Arizona or back here to Utah, so we would do different things. That was really fun. Once we finished our eight months of preparation, then we would get assigned an area, and usually they would switch twice within that year, so you would spend six months in an area, six other months at a different area. And it could be Boston, you know, it could be anywhere in the states; if you were able to, you would go to Mexico and do the northern part of Mexico. But I was assigned California and I stayed in California my entire year, which at first I was unhappy because I wanted to see other states, but overall it was a really good experience and I, yeah, I learned a lot. I think a part of my – I'm not the greatest public speaker, but being a missionary really pushed me to be a public speaker.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: So, I learned some skills along with that, that have now helped me professionally, but also have fulfilled my life and I understand the importance for me to be spiritually connected for my well-being, for my overall well-being, so yeah.

CG: Backtracking to the beginning-ish [laughter], so you mentioned, both in Mexico and then when you were in Colorado, you mentioned you had your larger family unit.

DE: Mm-hmm.

CG: Like, it wasn't just your parents and your siblings and you, you had like your uncle and your grandma. How did not having that here affect your sense of belonging or your relationship to the community?

DE: I – that is a really good question. I think it did affect me quite a bit because then I had to – you know, in Colorado I had relationships already built through blood lines, but here I kinda had to start from zero in deciding who I wanted to be part of my, you know, part of my family. So it took a really long time, my parents and I – The reason we now have more family is because my brother has now married and because I'm married. So our family grew, but we don't have family from my dad's side or my mom's side here in Utah, and it felt – it was harder because we didn't know people, we didn't know our way around so we kinda had to rely on the good faith of the people and whoever was willing

to lend a helping hand through our church. The reason why we got into an apartment was because someone in our church gave us a reference, without us knowing.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DE: I don't know if that's incriminating or not.

CG: Not. [Chuckles].

DE: Probably not right? [Laughter]. Gave a good character reference and that's how we were able to get an apartment. But if we didn't have – I mean, we literally had no one, we didn't know our way around the place, we didn't know who to call if we had an emergency or who to put as an emergency contact because we didn't have anyone. So, it was really hard. Now, you know, my best friends are my family... their kids call me aunty. We've built that sense of family here with, but it started with strangers. Yeah, it was very difficult.

CG: Then, I believe our last question is what would you like people to know about yourself or your community?

DE: I would like people to know that the Latino and Hispanic community are very hardworking people that just want a chance to become someone in life. You know, we're not here to steal anyone's job, we're not here to prevent someone from being successful because that's what we want for ourselves, and we want the same opportunities that everyone else has here in the U.S. Here in St. George, the fact that lots of us can't get into a home at the moment because of how expensive it is, we want that just as much as anyone else that is also struggling that is not Hispanic, that wants to get into a home. And we're not, just because we're either darker or we have an accent or we have different views religiously, doesn't mean that makes us worse people. It just makes us – we bring that seasoning to what St. George needs, in my opinion.

CG: [Chuckles].

DE: And for me, I would love for people to know that I am a resource, and that I'm someone who can help and that I can be ... maybe I don't know all the answers but I will try to find as much as I can. I kinda have a story about that. Not too long ago, our cleaning lady, she quit and she started a business. So she came into my office and she's like, "Hey, how are you doing? Can you help me fill out this application because I don't get it?" And I was so happy that she didn't think twice and said this isn't her job, this isn't her area of expertise. You know, she– I really hope she didn't have those thoughts, and I hope that by knowing me, she thought I can come to this girl, because she is always helpful, and it was, I feel so proud that she had the trust to come to me and say, "I don't understand this document, this legal document, can you translate it for me?" Or when people bring their bank statements or different things to me, and you know, nothing to do with my line of work, but they just want me to help them or when they ask me, "Do you speak Spanish?" And I say proudly, "Sí, claro, con mucho gusto. What can I help you with?" So, I wanna

be that person, especially my Latino and Hispanic community, but I'm there for anybody. That's what I want people to know.

CG: Great, thank you. If you don't have any other closing thoughts, we'll stop the recording.

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]