

Interview with
ALLISON MCMULLIN

September 13, 2023

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ALLISON MCMULLIN

Allison Jhoana McMullin was interviewed by Cameron Nielsen on September 13, 2023 in St. George, Washington County, Utah. She related her story of growing up in Latin America, and coming to and making a life in Southern Utah. Caitlinn Grimm also participated.

CN: All right. Well, I guess I start with [inaudible]. [Laughter] Well, my name's Cameron Nielsen. I'm interviewing for the Estamos Aquí/We Are Here oral history project. We are at Utah Tech University in St. George, Utah. And today is September 13th. I'm here with my co-investigator, Caitlinn Grimm, who is serving as the recorder, and we are interviewing Allison McMullin.

Allison, would you be able to state and spell your full name for the recording?

AM: Yes. My name is Allison Jhoana McMullin, A – L – L – I – S – O – N, J – H – O – A – N – A, M – C – M – U – L – L – I – N. And — oh, sorry, that's me.

CN: Thank you. And what languages do you speak?

AM: I speak Spanish, Castellano from Peru, and English, and a little bit of Quechua, which is our native language in Peru.

CN: Where were you born?

AM: Lima, Peru.

CN: All right. Now we get into the more narrative, open-ended questions here. So yeah. Tell us about your childhood and family.

AM: Mm-hmm, yes. I was born in Lima, Peru. I come from a big family on both sides, Mom and Dad. Where can I start here? I always say this. I was very blessed. I had a very big family, but I should say – what do you call it here? Extended family. I am the firstborn. I have two siblings. Sorry, let's pause. How do I do this? How do you say this, when it's – my parents are divorced now.

CG: Okay. Like stepsiblings, half siblings?

AM: And I have half siblings, yes. I should say that. That was what I was trying to think. So, back up again. I was born in Lima, Peru, and I have two younger siblings, sisters. And my parents are now divorced, and I have three other half siblings, much younger, much, much younger. But they're awesome. My father worked for the Peruvian military, so we were – sorry. He worked around the country a lot and other countries, so we moved around a lot. That was a blessing, and kind of hard for us, because we move a lot, but we were able to be in so many different cities and countries because of his work. My mom

was a teacher until I was about five years old, and then she decided to stay home and raise her kids and traveled with my father because of his job. Like I said, I have two younger sisters who I grew up with. We are five and a half years apart each, so my sister Andrea and my other sister Nicole. And yeah. Like I said, I come from a big family. My father is number six out of nine, and my mom is number three out of six. Yeah. Very close to all my family, uncles, aunties, cousins, grandparents. I only have one living grandparent now. But yeah, it was good. It was fun. I cannot – I had a good childhood until I moved to the U.S. when I was eighteen years old. If I can say anything else, please let me know if I can put anything else in there.

CN: I guess I'm curious what other countries you spent the most time in when you while your family was moving around.

AM: Yeah. So I've been all over Peru, all over Peru, first of all. Live in [laughter] a lot of places. Ecuador was the closest one. We spent a couple of – closer to a year. I live in Cusco for a year, so I've been to Machu Picchu way too many times. [Laughter] Then we lived for a little bit in Venezuela. And then my father – in Venezuela, sorry, and then Brazil. And my father traveled to Africa due to his work. He was part of the Peruvian army as an engineer. He was a lieutenant colonel, is what they call it, I believe. Close to a – before a general. He never got to the general part. And then he was recruited for the United Nations, so he worked for the United Nations for about five years, and he was able to live in [different countries].

CN: So you say you were able to stay very close with your extended family?

AM: Yes.

CN: Did you guys visit your cousins? Did they visit you?

AM: Mm-hmm. So for about my first five years, we lived with both sets of grandparents at some point, because of my father's traveling. My mom wasn't sure she wanted to go with him yet, so it was – we lived with my father's mom, my grandma Esther, for a year and a half or two, and then we move in with my abuelita, my grandma Natalia, my mom's mom, for about two years and a half or so. In Peru, we don't have homes, like first floors, like one floor homes. It's stack if you mean. It's like a building, right? So the first floor is the living room, kitchen, eating area, and then the second floor is grandparents and bathrooms, third floor, auntie or uncle there live, fourth floor. So that's how we live in the same home, but we had different apartments, but we all share the same dining room, living room, kitchen area.

CG: Mm-hmm.

AM: And both grandparents had the same type of house structure.

CN: That makes sense.

AM: Yeah.

CN: All right. Well, tell me about school.

AM: Okay. What can I tell you about that?

CN: I guess, what was it like? You guys moved around a lot. That must have been difficult.

AM: Yeah. So, I always went to what we call in Peru a military-affiliated school, meaning that I lived on a base, right? All the schools that I went to from when I started school at three years old until I graduated when I was sixteen were funded and located at a military base. I grew up, I feel like, with, at some point, the same set of friends, because we, even though we all move around to different locations in Peru, we always came back to the same location at some point, which is where the military school is located, which is in Chorrillos, and it's a city in Lima. Chorrillos has a military school, military base, and all, and then the housing for the military families. And then that's where you find kindergarten, primary, and secondary school, as well. And they're all in a big location, much like Utah Tech. And it's enclosed, so only authorized personnel can go in. So, it was very safe. Sometimes too safe, 'cause you couldn't skip school. [Laughter] Not that I tried, I should say. But I wanted to. So, at some point – and all of them, as I described before, all of them had some sort of similarities when you go to a different city in Peru. A lot smaller, but same location of school, kindergarten, primary, and secondary school, housing, base, and military school. So they were all kind of the same. My parents chose for us to stay within that and did not send us to any public schools, per se, because this was considered private in Peru. I kind of grew up with the same sort of friends or knew of them, because if I moved to Moquegua, which is another city, or Tumbes, we at some point saw each other. But we all ended up in the same high school at the end. So that was very nice to see them. But yeah. It was, kind of, the same kindergarten. Peru starts at three, what you call here preschool. Yeah. Preschool, or pre-preschool. [Laughter] I have my kid in preschool. She's four. So it's preschool. But they start at three, and you go from eight a.m. to three p.m. Yeah. Until you graduate high school. It's the same thing. And uniforms are very strict. I wore uniforms from when I was three until I was sixteen years old. [Laughter] So not much background on having to choose what you – what here you call back to school shopping.

CN: Mm-hmm.

CG: Mm-hmm.

AM: None of that. You already had – you had to go to your school and pick up the size of what you were going to wear, blouse, skirt, socks, shoes, and cardigan. Every year. So yeah. And I went to – my high school, Pedro Ruiz Gallo, I went there for, thankfully, my last four years, because my family decided – my father decided for us to stay in Lima, and that's when he was also recruited for United Nations, so we couldn't travel with him. And that was awesome. I loved being able to stay home and in that high school for my last four years. Yeah.

CN: Fantastic. Thank you. Describe some of your favorite religious or cultural traditions that you grew up with.

AM: Yeah. So I grew up Catholic. I still claim being Catholic. I don't practice it, but on – I'm so sorry. I don't know what they call it here in English, Semana Santa. Holy Week, maybe? In April. No. Yes? Maybe?

CG: Yes, that's in April.

AM: Yeah?

CG: Leading up to Easter?

AM: Yes, yes. So we do – I celebrate that to a degree, especially when my abuelita, my mom's mom, was alive. When she visited, we did go to church, but just because of her. But other than that, yes, I grew up Catholic. I did my baptism and my first communion. I can still pray and remember those words. But throughout my life, yes, I attended many events that we have in Peru, because Peru is primarily or dominantly – Catholicism is our religion, so we have a lot of festivities throughout the year. Like October, next month, we start El Señor de los Milagros. So it's a whole month of celebrating this saint. It's fun, because we have a lot going on, and you do a procession. It's a very large one. It's one of the biggest ones in South America, because it's blocks and blocks and blocks, and it's thousands of people following this huge saint behind through each church. And Lima was the first – sorry, I need to look up the word. Virreinato, I don't know. Virreinato of Spain. Viceroyalty, because we were conquered by Spain. So we were the first viceroyalty of Spain, the biggest one, because we were part of the Incan Empire. So with that said, we have or hold most of the churches, Catholic churches, in South America. So we do a procession of all of them in October. We all do it. And we finish at the cathedral, which is beautiful, and it's big. And we all don't fit there, so we're just outside, and, you know, the father just gives their speech, and all of that. So I love October in Peru, because of all the celebrations throughout the month. We don't celebrate Halloween. We celebrate our Music Day, which is our traditional music, marinera, huayno, y Negroide. Those are our three primary musics. And we just get together as a family, we listen to music, and we dance, and we eat, and we drink. So those – October is my favorite month.

December is my favorite month but then, because of those cultural traditions that we have with Christmas. We also go to church, but we don't have Santa Claus or, you know – we know who's giving our gifts, so we can be thankful to those people. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

AM: So it was fun, because we always have to talk to our abuelitas, abuelitos, grandparents, tías and tíos, uncles and aunties, to let them know what we wanted for Christmas. And then we made the birth of –

CN: Nativity?

AM: Nativity scene in our home. You know, it's in your house with your tree. But then it's a – the bigger you make it, the cooler you are, right?

[Laughter]

AM: So it's half of your living room, you know. And you buy the little animals, and then the little house, and you cover Jesus until the 25th, even though he wasn't born that day, but you cover him. And then on the 25th, we don't go to sleep. So, the 24th, we make a huge dinner, turkey, pork. There is panetón, which is a fruitcake. Hot chocolate, champagne, and pisco, our traditional wine there. We, as a whole family, from oldest to youngest, are there sitting. We eat from eight to eleven, say, and then we wait until midnight, and we put the radio on, because then they start counting, you know. And the radio is, like, "Okay, five minutes until Christmas." And then, you know, Ten, diez, eleven, they start counting. And then everybody is, "Merry Christmas, Feliz Navidad!", and we start hugging each other. Then all the kids go to open their presents, and you must sit there and see them open them all. Then the youngest child in your family will open Jesus' crib, [laughter] which is just a little bit of cotton ball on top.

[Laughter]

AM: And we welcome Jesus. Then after that, the kids go to sleep. An hour or two later, we light some fireworks before they go to sleep. Then they go to sleep, and then the real party starts with the adults.

CN: [Laughter]

AM: And we're just drinking and dancing. My grandmother's house, my abuelita's, she was called the mama of the barrio, of the neighborhood. She just passed away this past July. But she opened the doors, and everybody would just stop by, and Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad. Go in, have a couple drinks, go back to their families. It's my favorite traditions, Christmas, December, October. It's just so much fun because your whole family's there. All of us have the same time off, so we kind of get to see everybody. And everybody that is out of the country can come back, like myself. I can go home and celebrate the holidays with them when it's our year, because between my husband and I, we switch every year, 'cause his family's from St. George. So, we go every other year. [At least we used to before COVID and our children were born.] So yeah.

CN: Lovely. So yeah, speaking of St. George, what brought you to the St. George area?

AM: School. So, I went to – I was looking for schools. I went to Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, which is also a Catholic university in Peru that belongs to Opus Dei. It's one of the best universities in Lima, Peru. I went there for about a year and a half. I loved it. I made a lot of friends. My father and my mom were living in a different city, so it was the first time living by myself with my family. I was living with my abuelita, with

my grandma. And like I said, I went to this university, and then I started working at McDonald's, because that was the job to have back then. Right?

CN: [Laughter]

AM: If you work at McDonald's, you will be cool. And it was like three blocks down the street from my big university, which is also enclosed, and only authorized personnel could go in. To me, it's surreal to see an open university.

CN: Okay.

AM: You know? In Peru, they're all closed. You can only go in if you have your ID card, and there are guards, and you must show them, or you must scan it [inaudible]. So, there was this mall three weeks down the street from my university, and there were all these McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, you know, the big stores, Pizza Hut, clothing stores, you know? Bunch of stuff. And the place to work was McDonald's. Their interview process was hard. I'm gonna tell you that. It was interesting to see how they did that over there, 'cause you had to have the personality to work there, and be able to greet your guests, and talk to your guests, and all of that. But a friend of mine that worked there was going on an exchange program. This is why I'm talking about McDonald's, which was the best job ever –

CG: [Laughter]

AM: – because you eat free food, and you were just hanging out with your friends. So, my friend was going on an exchange, what they call work and travel. My friend was doing this work and traveling to Denver. They were going to work at a ski resort, and for only three months, and then came back to our university. Most of us went to the same university that we worked at McDonald's. And I was, like, "Oh, how do you do that? How do you find out about that? Where do I go?" And he's like, "Yeah, yeah. You can go to this agency, and then ask for more information." I said, "Oh, that would be awesome." So, I did. I went to this private agency that they were – and they did what is a J-1 exchange, work and travel. Come to the U.S. You learn English and you work. It's primarily at ski resorts or resort areas where they need more personnel per season. And the winter season is our vacation in Peru because we go on vacation from December until March.

CN: Wow.

AM: That's our summer. I should say, that's our summer. Christmas in Peru is summer, and it's the best thing ever. Yes! Because you are just having fun. You go to the beach, and you're just having a great time. I should say that. So, it's our summer. And he's, like, "Yeah, go and work, and make some money, and come back." And I said, "Yeah, I'm going to do that." I went to the agency and signed up for it. Had to call my dad and my mom. My mom is, like, "You should do it!" And I'm, like, "I know, Mom." My dad is, like, "I don't know. You know?" And I'm, like, "Please, I really want to do it. Whatever

money I make, I'll pay for my own school." "Okay, you can do that." And I'm, like, "Great, thank you. I need this much money to invest in this. You're investing, Dad." He's, like, "Okay." So, I went and did it.

Signed up for it, and I wanted to choose a location close to my family in California. I have family in California. I have two uncles. But I did not want to be in California. It's not my cup of tea. I live in big cities, and don't do that anymore. Don't like it. So, my uncle was, like, "Well, go closer. Where can you go that I can get to you if anything happens?" Right? And just looking at maps and the locations that they had available, they have this resort called Brian Head. And I was, like, "Oh, I want to go to Brian Head." [Laughter] Not knowing anything about it. You know? Just knew that a city was close by, Parowan, and another bigger city close by, Cedar City. And I said, I'm golden. This is gonna be great. The map says this is a big place. You know?

[Laughter]

AM: I ended up being accepted into Brian Head, the Brian Head Resort program, and then applied for my visa, and then got it, and then I left on December 14th of 2007. Yes, 2007, I think. Oh, my gosh, it's been so long.

[Laughter]

AM: That was just the fun part, because I got to – I went Lima, Peru, Dallas [Texas]; Dallas to Las Vegas [Nevada]. And the coordinator of Brian Head Resort for the exchange students, he's, like, "Okay. When you get to Las Vegas, you need to take a taxi to the Greyhound, and the Greyhound, there you take a bus that will bring you all the way to St. George, and we will pick you up from St. George, Utah." Right? Okay. Sounds great. I can do that. I got to Las Vegas Airport. I have three humongous pieces of luggage, because who doesn't travel with so much?

CG: [Chuckles.]

AM: Right? And then take a taxi. Met this cool dude that just talked to me the whole way, because I was so nervous. And he's, like, "It's gonna be all right. You got this." And I'm like, "Great. Thank you." He talked to me the whole time. He took me on a little tour of Vegas, you know. I was eighteen years old. [Laughter] A little tour of Vegas driving. And he said, "This is the Strip, and this is Fremont." And I'm, like, "Thank you." And then right off Fremont, that's the Greyhound. Like, Fremont Street is right here, and the Greyhound is right here. Right? He's, like, "Here we go." And I'm, like, "Thank you so much." He helped me with my luggage. I get to the Greyhound, and the next bus leaves in like six hours. And I was, like, "Great. All right." Call my coordinator. "It leaves in six hours." "Oh, we know." And I'm, like, "Great. I'll be there soon."

CN: [Laughter]

AM: I took the bus. Everything is all right. I got to St. George, the McDonald's on Bluff. Was

it Bluff? Or Sunset?

CN: Sunset?

AM: Yes, this one. I don't remember. The one right here, down the street. I don't know which one is that one. Sorry.

CN: That would be Bluff, yeah.

AM: Bluff? Yes? Yeah. So dropped me off there, and there is my coordinator. And she lives in New Harmony, and she's, like, "We're gonna sleep at my home, and then I'll take you to Brian Head tomorrow." And I said, "Great." I'm all excited. So, we drove with her spouse to New Harmony, and they have this all – this cool lodge house. It was just a very – it was huge, but it was just wood. It was cool. But they did not have running water. Yeah. I'm telling you.

CN: A real log cabin, huh?

AM: It was that. And I was, like, it's – and I've seen *Freddy [vs.] Jason*, and I'm, like, the whole time I'm thinking, I'm gonna die. You know? This is it. This is it for "Alli" [Allison] Aguirre. This is it. And nah. They were awesome. And they were, like, "Yeah. Hey, yeah, just do this and that," and they set me up. Next morning, go to Brian Head. And I checked in in my room, met a couple of other people from Argentina. We all have the same break, so Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru. There were a couple of Peruvians, not all of them, and not from my program. I was the only one from that program that came to Utah. I met them all, and I started working at the resort, the condominium there, as a housekeeper. And then part time, I also work at the Navajo lift. I don't know if you are familiar with Brian Head. There are three lifts, and the bunny hill.

CG: Oh, yeah.

AM: The Navajo lift, that's where I worked, too, part time. And that's where I started. Yeah. And then I found out about SUU [Southern Utah University] in Cedar City. And I went and asked for more information about their programs and decided to just continue my education through SUU. So, I got into their intensive English program for two semesters. I wanted to say – okay. For two semesters. And while in Brian Head, I met my spouse, my husband. Do I need to tell you that?

CG: That's up to you.

AM: Okay. No, he loves this story.

CG: [Laughter]

AM: We tell it to everybody. I was working at Navajo lift and – sorry. I was going down the hill on my skis to grab a Starbucks, and I was at the Navajo lift. I noticed this very tall

guy standing on the side, smoking. My grandma smoked since I was young, so I'm used to the smell, and I missed it. So, I saw this guy, and I'm, like, Ooh. [Laughter] Hello! I went and approached him, and I asked him what time it was. And then he's, like, Oh. We started talking. He's, like, "Oh, you're from Peru?" And I'm, like, "Yeah. I just working here." And he's, like, "Great. I'm here with my family. Let me introduce you to them." And I'm, like, "Okay!"

[Laughter]

AM: I went up to the dining room area that they have for food, and he was there with his youngest nieces, because that was their first time skiing and snowboarding. I met his sisters. Now, mind you, he comes from a family of seven. So, I met two sisters, a brother, and maybe his parents. I don't recall. But his nieces. And we started talking. And he told me he was from St. George. And I'm, like, "Oh, I just stopped by their McDonald's there. That was very fun." [Laughter] So he's, like, "Oh, yeah. Well, you know, can I come visit you next time?" And I'm, like, "Absolutely. That would be awesome." You know? Then he came to visit me two weekends after, and then we started dating. I guess, yeah? Because we haven't been apart since. We started dating.

Then I started looking at schools, and I decided to go to SUU. [I was there for only a semester...] I couldn't hack it. I did not know that SUU was a university town, meaning that once the student leaves, there is nothing. And I was, like – my spring semester was awesome, 'cause I was living in Manzanita. I got admitted. I was living in Manzanita, which is now demolished, much like our [Utah Tech University's] Nisson Towers. And they had new building – yeah. Manzanita. And I was living with these really cool girls. They were all from Salt Lake City, and they were awesome. And they took me to their homes for breaks and stuff, and they introduced me to their family. But then they left for the spring. And they're like, "Alli, we'll be back in the fall." And I'm, like, "Okay. I'll see you guys in the fall." I couldn't hack it past the summer. And I found out about Dixie State College. Right? Because my boyfriend lived here, and he's, like, "Come to college with me. I'm here." And I'm, like, "Okay." I start looking into it, and they have a really small international office. There was only a part-time officer that could admit international students. I start chatting with her. And she's, like, "Yeah, let's transfer you here." I transferred here, and I live here since. [Laughter] So 2008, summer 2008. Yeah.

CN: Fantastic. Any follow-up questions?

CG: Not with that one.

CN: None comes to mind, yeah? Yeah, you're good at telling stories, so we don't need to ask a lot of questions.

AM: Oh. [Laughter]

CN: How have your religious and cultural traditions changed since childhood or being in St. George?

AM: They have changed a lot. First and foremost, I haven't practiced Catholicism as much as I did when I was living in Peru. I did find out where the church was here. I did talk to the father/priest. But besides that, I've never follow up since. And I know their location and all of that. My husband's family are all LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], but he's not. And a couple of them, a couple of the children are not, four of them. The rest are LDS. So it was – I had to adapt, and I had to do it very quick, because I felt that if I didn't, I will not – now that I'm thinking it, it just makes me a little bit, like, hmm. I had to adapt very fast to the fact that there were – for me to be seen as part of them, I had to, kind of – I'm an observer. I observe a lot of things. I have, and I tried to – what is it? It's not camouflage. I don't want to say imitate, either. But I adapt to situations very fast. So I – this is an experience, though. I was talking about – we were having dinner with my husband's family, my boyfriend's family at the time. And I was talking about Catholicism, and how it is, and what it is, and what you do. And a member of the family stated, "Well, that's" – what is the word that they used? Oh, my goodness, I cannot remember the word. But it impacted me in such a way that I stopped talking about it. It was like it was fake. That religion is not the truth. Right? You know? And my first thought, you know – and mind you, I grew up in a very Latino family where you don't talk back to your elder, right? Never. And it has impacted me in a way that I'm teaching that to my daughters. And sometimes I'm, like, hmm okay. [Laughter] But we don't talk back, even if we don't agree. Or you can say, "Hm, okay. Está bien, no te preocupes. We're good. Don't worry." But you don't say, Arr. You don't talk back. You don't fight it. You don't, you know, present facts or say anything that may make your elder feel embarrassed or that they're not educated about situations, and they are speaking of it but they don't know the whole truth about it. So when this member of the family said this about being Catholic, and it's fake, and – What is the word for it that they used? And I cannot remember now. And I will remember it later. When you believe in something that is – not fake. I'm gonna – ugh, it's bothering me. Sorry, guys. It's really bothering me. It wasn't fake.

CN: Superstitious, or –

CG: Maybe false?

AM: Right, like when – like saints are not real. But they used a word, and I can't remember it. But it impacted me so much that I stopped talking about it, because –

CG: Imaginary? No?

AM: Yeah, it's not real. Let's just say, it was just not real, that that's just preposterous for us to talk about things like that. You know? Even though Joseph Smith found something' in a tree. Obviously, I did not say this. I did not think of it. And I'm, like, "I'm sorry, what?" You know? The whole time that we are talking and whatever. In this conversation, we are just – it was so light, like I was just talking, you know. Because I am the first Hispanic, Peruvian person in this family. In the whole family. Like, even extended family. We're talking about people that are from Roosevelt, Utah; Vernal, Utah; Panguitch, Utah.

CN: [Chuckles]

AM: You know? You don't see color. Right? It's all white. So I was the new toy, per se. I was brand new! And, you know. So I was just interesting to see that, to hear that, and then I was, like, "Oop, yeah, okay. I'm not going to talk about it. You believe what you believe. I believe what I believe. We're gonna just call it good." So even though the conversation has been brought up many times, because both my children have godmothers, [chuckles] and I do want to baptize them at some point, so their godmothers can be officially part of that atmosphere of, you know, if something happens to us, you'll take care of our babies.

But it was interesting to kind of back off and see what they think, what they believe, how they believe. You know, I was surprised by many things. Like Sundays, most stores were closed. And, you know, well, that's my shopping day. [Laughter] I'm busy. What do I do? Adapting to that. You know, religious-wise, I started wearing an undershirt, because I felt like my clothing was too revealing back then. And I was eighteen, nineteen years old. I'm dressing with miniskirts and, you know, showing my cleavage or my midriff, you know, and wearing just cool stuff. Right? Because that's Peru. In Peru, that's what you wear because you're cool, you're a kid. And here, it wasn't. You know? My roommates all wear their white shirts underneath, or black shirts, depending on the shirt. Same with my husband's family, my boyfriend's family at the time. So in my head, I'm, like, I need to respect this, and I have to do it. And I did, and I'm still doing it. I don't know why, but I just feel uncomfortable not wearing something, an undershirt or something like that. So yeah, I did that. I changed my clothing attire, too, not being looked upon like, she's not – you know, she's different. I didn't want to be seen as that. It only lasted about three years, two years, and then I was, like, "Huh. Heck no." [Laughter] You know? And then I went back to my old self. But it's interesting how, you know, your young mind is still getting shaped at that age, eighteen, nineteen years old, and you're thinking, "Oh, I want them to like me, and I want them to get used to me." Then I realized that being loud, awesome, and cool is awesome. So, I just went back to that.

With cultural traditions, though, I had to bite my tongue about Santa Claus, 'cause I don't believe in the guy. You know? It's cool and everything that y'all do that. And you all, I mean you, microphone.

[Laughter]

AM: Because we never did, you know. I grew up thanking the people that gave me those gifts, you know, because they thought of me, or I asked for it, and they were, like, "Oh, okay, yeah." And I deserved it, because of what I did throughout my whole year. Right? So yeah. That was a bit hard for me to realize that that wasn't a thing here. And that you must wear pajamas before you go to sleep. Well, I guess it's a tradition of the McMullins.

[Laughter]

AM: They give you pajamas. You must open 'em. You change. We all change. We took a

family picture. And then you have – they are musical people. They're all musicals. They all play an instrument, violin, cello, piano, guitar, and a couple of them are singers, have awesome voices. So we have a small musical, per se, and everybody gets to show off what they want to show off. And then we all go to bed until the next day! The kids – if you are staying at Nana's and Pop-pop's, which are my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, then you get to wake up as early as you want, and hopefully one of the kids is awake, or you're waking them up, and you're, like, "It's presents time." You know? And then everybody must wake up so we can open presents, and take pictures, and video it.

So it was a neat tradition, not what I was used to. And I didn't go home for a couple years, and it was hard for me to do it, but it was a lot harder when my mom and sisters came to visit. [Laughter] Because, like, "What are they doing?" And I'm, like, "Wearing pajamas, Mom." "Why?"

CN: [Laughter]

AM: I'm, like, "I don't know. It's what they do." "What was the music?" And I'm, like, "Oh, they have the musical coming up." "Where is the music?" [Laughter] So yeah, that changed for us. But now – yeah, no. So that was just interesting to see.

October, celebrating Halloween. I've never [laughter] celebrated Halloween until I was in college back in Peru, and it was the American thing to do. And you didn't have to go home to visit with your family if you didn't want to. I still did because my family is really cool and really fun. But then at night, you go to a club or a bar. Drinking age in Peru is eighteen years old.

CG: [Chuckles]

AM: So you will go, dressed up. Everybody dressed as a bunny, but I should say, the Hugh Hefner bunny.

All: The Playboy bunnies.

AM: You know, because that was the thing. So I was Ursula, I don't know why, one year. Anywho, so yeah. The whole thing with pumpkins. Like, "Let's do pumpkins." And I'm, like, "Okay, what does that mean? Do we eat them?" Like, "Yeah, well, you can do the seeds." And I'm, like, "Oh, okay." And then you have to carve them. Never carved a pumpkin in my life. So that was neat. And then Halloween, of course. And then Thanksgiving. [Laughter] What is Thanksgiving, right? I had to look it up and figure out, what that was. I read a lot of things about it, and it still didn't make sense to me, because of the literature that I found about it. Because, you know, you don't learn a lot about the – in Peru, you learn world history, but not in depth, right? Your Independence Days, we can tell all of them, fourth of July 1774, and all that, who signed it, who George Washington is, and all of that. But Thanksgiving, the history behind is [inaudible]?

CG: Roanoke? Is that what you're trying to –

AM: Roanoke, that town in Virginia? Is that –

CG: Yes.

CN: That's not [inaudible] to do with Thanksgiving, though. You're thinking of Plymouth.

AM: Oh, okay.

CN: Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts.

AM: Yes. Yeah, you learn a couple of things from that. Yes. But Thanksgiving never happens. And then you do, and then you find out about it. And I read about it. I'm, like, this makes no sense, but I guess it's just unity and family now, is what it's become. So celebrating that with 150 McMullins my first year was awesome –

CN: Oh!

AM: – because there's a bunch of them. I'm sure I'm exaggerating the number, but I felt like there were a million. But yeah. So, with my husband's family, they rotate. One year is with the McMullins, and one year is with the Owens. McMullins and Owens, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. And yeah. Never celebrated that in my life, and I did. And great food. It's great food and catching up with family that you don't see throughout the year. But yeah.

Other traditions that I – I'm trying to think. And I was asking my mom about this because I was, like, what are traditions that we don't do anymore? And celebrating Independence Day for us is July 28th. It's a huge thing. Like, we have a week off in Peru. You know? And there is a parade, and much of what you see here. But then you have parties every day from different families or friends, and there you go and celebrate Peru, and you're singing the national anthem all day long with everybody. Even when you have a couple of drinks in you, you're still doin' it.

[Laughter]

AM: My mom lives with me now, so ever since, we are celebrating July 28th very well. So, it's fun. But yeah, I don't have more than that, I think. Yeah. I think the one that has impacted me the most has been the Christmas holiday, I guess, 'cause now that I have kids, it has been a – what is this called? My husband and I get along very, very well. We match. He's, my dude. We match very well. And even with cultural differences at the beginning, we talked them out or we talked about things. And we didn't have kids until – we were married for ten years before we had children. We were together for thirteen years but married ten, and then we decided to have our kids. And Christmas, you know. What I thought, what I believe, and he believes, it was clashing! And I never thought we would, and it was, because, you know, I wanted my child to open these presents, and, you know, they had the names of the people that had purchased this for them. And then he did

not like that. He was so totally against that. And, you know, “Santa Claus is not coming until midnight, Alli.” [Laughter] You know? “And our kids have to go to sleep, and they have to open their presents tomorrow.” You know? To me, it’s, like, “Well, we’re going to go –” I still call it home – “but we’re going to go home next year. It’s not going to be the same. You know? All of my aunties, uncles, and cousins are going to be, like, ‘Here you go.’ What are you going to tell them?” [Laughter] Yeah, that was one tradition that still I did not think was going to affect me as much until now. Having my kids, it’s been a thing, but we come to an agreement, and we’re going to go with that. Yeah.

CN: All right. All right. So shifting gears here a bit, will you tell me about your work?

AM: My work? Yeah. As of right now, or for the past – I mean, I should say –

CN: How far back do you want to go, I guess?

AM: [Laughter] My first job was McDonald’s, [laughter] and it was great! It was the best job I ever had! They paid me so well, I thought. But no. I’ve worked in the hospitality and food industry for a long time. I work at the McDonald’s, then resort, and then on campus at SUU in their dining services, and then when I move here, also here on campus. But I also work for eleven glorious years at Red Robin restaurant. I still miss you guys.

CG: [Laughter]

AM: It was awesome. But I work at – well, I got my degree here at Utah Tech University as an international student. I worked at the CIB, which was the MIC [Multicultural Inclusion Center] back then, in the Center of Inclusion and Belonging as a peer coach, peer advisor, and then as an advisor. And then I saw an opportunity open at the international office, or international student services back then. And I took it, and I moved departments. And I have worked there since, so it’s been about six years now. But with both jobs, I work here on campus and at Red Robin simultaneously, or at the same time. But I had to let go of Red Robin after the birth of my first kid. It was heartbreaking. I really miss being a bartender and a server. It was fun. But I love my job here on campus a lot more. I work with all of the new and returning and continuing international students on campus. We currently have about 220. And those include all our F-1 long-term students and our J-1 short-term students, as well as our scholars and visiting professors.

So I came as an international student, and I work in the international student office. I absolutely love my job. I’m the immigration coordinator. I’ve also been working on the study abroad as an interim coordinator, too. And yeah, I work with many, many students from different countries. I feel like there’s a new country or country every year. It’s my first-year meeting somebody from Latvia and Belarus. And they’re awesome. They’re cool. Never met people from those countries, so I can check it off.

CG: [Laughter]

AM: But yeah, we have students from Congo, from Nigeria, from China, Japan, Canada,

Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Morocco, so many, Indonesia. Our first Indonesian guy, too, is here. I just talked to him yesterday. He's really cool. But yeah. My job has allowed me to be not only on the immigration sides, making sure that they're here and they're following all regulations stated by the federal government, the Department of State, and also some Utah Tech policies that they must follow, but I've been able to connect with all of these students. I serve as an advisor, as a mentor, because not only do I see them throughout their academic career here at Utah Tech, you know, from beginning until they graduate – and we have the highest graduation rate in our office – but also after, because per federal regulations, they're also allowed to work between one to three years, depending on the degree that they obtain, here in the U.S., and I oversee that, as well. So I get to also see their lives after Utah Tech. And it makes me so happy to see where they're going, what they're doing. You know, I have a student right now doing her doctorate at Purdue from the Philippines. And she's amazing. She's always keeping in touch, you know, with all of us. That's what I do. Mm-hmm.

CN: That's really exciting. All right. Just real quick, I guess, what's been your experience with the larger St. George community, and particularly as it relates to the Latino and Hispanic community and environment here, and relationships there?

AM: Yeah. So when I came to St. George, many years ago – fifteen I feel, maybe? I can't, calculator. So I was the first international student from Peru. So we were only like fifteen of us here at the international office, and I did not know a lot of people that spoke Spanish or were Hispanic or Latino. But Professor Leonor Ceballos from the Humanities Department, the Spanish teacher there, and Professor Luis Arevalo. So those are a couple of connections that I made on campus when it comes to that, you know, feeling like – speaking Spanish and all of that. But in order to connect with a lot of them, like I mentioned before, I went to the Catholic church and kind of tried to make some connections with my fellow Latino people, Hispanic people. It was very difficult, because we were at different stages of our lives, I think. Most of them were families, and they have working parents and children that were going to school, while I was a college student, so I couldn't connect very well with all of them. I did some babysitting for a couple of them. It was great, but beyond that, I didn't have a great connection until we started growing. And St. George has grown so much since. As we grow as an institution, I was able to connect with more students that – we were recruiting students from different countries, and Peru was one of them. And then I was able to bring my sisters to Utah Tech as students. So both of them came to Utah Tech and graduated from Utah Tech.

But other than that, with making connections, I should say that I went to a lot of Alberto's, Alvaro's, Mexican food restaurants [laughter] to see what they have going on. And, you know, if they knew of things that were going on in our town that we could be part of. And all of them went back to Semana Santa, Holy Week. And then I think there was another one. It wasn't Cinco de Mayo. It was something else that they celebrated because we don't celebrate Cinco de Mayo in Peru. So they all went back to those, "Oh, yeah, we're going to go – they're going to close down the block by the church. We're going to go celebrate this." And that's where primarily we'll see individuals or people that I knew and make those connections. But other than that, I really kept myself to the

university community, because I lived on campus, and I was primarily going to school and work here on campus.

But later, like I mentioned, they were recruiting more international students. I was able to make those connections, and then I was able to bring my sisters here to go to school. They were the ones that kind of introduced me to the younger Latino community here, because they're more out there, especially with the popping up of all the social media platforms. I was a Facebook kid. They're Instagram, Snapchat, BeReal kids. So we were able to do that. That was neat. And then my mom moved here, and she even broader community, [laughter] because she works at Ross, the department store, clothing store, and all of her friends speak Spanish. So she's always just going to Mesquite [Nevada] with them to go gambling and eat at buffet, or they are having parties at their clubhouses here, and she goes to those, as well. But she has really good friends that are from Mexico and Peru where she works, so that has also brought up a lot of invitations to baby showers, quinceañeras, and other parties that they may have. Yeah. I should say, I was pretty closed off until I was able to connect with more people and my sisters moved to town. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

CN: All right. Well, I think we're just about done.

AM: Okay.

CN: What would you like people to know about yourself or your community, just to wrap up?

AM: Yes. You know, we embrace diversity. We adapt. As a minority, sometimes we are quicker to think outside of the box. We are able to welcome everybody anywhere, and it's fun, and it's fun to see others being able to be open minded to that. Not just fun, but also it feels good to have that, being embraced of it, and being able to see that nowadays. Now, when I move here many years ago, it was different. It wasn't as open as it is now, because there is so many people moving into St. George, and St. George is growing, and there is a bigger Latino community now. And you'll see that everywhere, as well, but specifically with St. George, it's neat to have that, especially because now that I have kids, my children, I want them to see that they can embrace both cultures. And sometimes it's difficult to see, because, you know, some families don't speak Spanish, and my kids do. Sometimes they communicate that way, or say stuff in Spanish, and the people that don't speak Spanish get frustrated instead of realizing that they could answer in English, and my kids will understand, as well. You know? And sometimes it's just the comfort language, because my mother lives with me, like I mentioned, and she speaks Spanish. So that's the comfort language for some of them, for us. It's just interesting to see that. But being open minded, being curious about what we do, and what we can do, and what we can show you, is always fun. Asking questions. Any questions. It's good to see. I asked a lot of questions when I came in regards to their religion and, you know, the expectations, and I receive a lot of good answers. And I think that goes both ways. So yeah.

CN: All right. Thank you so much.

AM: Yes, of course. Thank you.

CG: If there's nothing else you'd like to say, then I'll stop the recording.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]