

Interview with
GABRIELA HURTADO

March 30, 2023

**ESTAMOS AQUÍ / WE ARE HERE:
LATINO VOICES IN ST. GEORGE, UTAH
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
ST. GEORGE, UTAH**

#2023-004

Utah Tech University provides access to its collections as an unaltered, authentic historical record to aid in the research and understanding of history, while acknowledging their impact on various peoples and groups. Some collection materials are reflective of past cultures and prejudices, including images or words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful. The University does not support, condone or endorse these harmful ideas, behaviors or attitudes, and they do not reflect the official opinion of the University. Rather, the University embraces a culture that prioritizes diversity and inclusion, as demonstrated in the University's Mission, Core Themes and Values.

Final editing was completed in 2023.
For permission to use any part of this transcript contact:

Special Collections and Archives
Utah Tech University Library
Holland Centennial Commons 330
Utah Tech University
St. George, UT 84770
(435) 634-2087
specialcollections@utahtech.edu

This program has received funding from Utah
Humanities and Utah Division of State History.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or
recommendations expressed in this interview do not necessarily represent those
of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Utah Humanities, or
Utah Division of State History.



INDEX

Arizona	6
Bolivia	5, 19, 20
Book of Mormon	12, 14, 21
Camila [sister]	5
Canyon Pointe	8
Carlos [brother]	5
childhood	5, 6
Christmas	10, 11
church	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22
community	5, 6, 9, 15, 23, 24
cousin	13, 14
culture shock	7
dad	5, 8, 13, 20
Dixie Downs	18
Dixie State College	19
festival	15
gay	13, 14, 15
guilt	8, 9
homeless	7
La Semana Santa	10
Lamanites	12, 21
LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]	6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 22
Los Angeles [California]	5
microaggressions	16, 17
mission	8, 14, 19, 22
mom	5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 20, 21, 22
Mormon [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]	8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21, 22, 23
Native Americans	12, 21, 24
Nephites	12, 21
Norwalk [California]	5, 6
racist	15, 16, 17
Rony [husband]	5

school	7, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Snow Canyon	16, 17, 19
Spanish radio station	15
Texas	22, 23
traditions	8
uncle	7, 13, 14
white Americans	16
white people	11, 12, 16, 24

GABRIELA HURTADO

Content Warning: Contains words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful.

Gabriela Hurtado was interviewed by Caitlinn Grimm on March 30, 2023 at Utah Tech University in St. George, Washington County, Utah. She related her story of moving from California to St. George, growing up in St. George, and her experiences as a Latina with the Latter-day Saint community. Eva Sanchez also participated.

CG: So, hello this is Caitlinn Grimm. I'm here today with Gabriela Hurtado and Eva Sanchez is acting as a recorder. It is March 30th, 2023 and we're at Utah Tech University.

So, Gabriela, can you please state and spell your full name?

GH: Yeah, my name is Gabriela Hurtado. It's spelled G - A - B - R - I - E - L - A H - U - R - T - A - D - O.

CG Thank you. What languages do you speak?

GH: I speak Spanish and English.

CG: And then, where were you born?

GH: I was born in Los Angeles, California.

CG: We'll just switch over to the more open-ended questions now. So now, can you tell me about your childhood and family?

GH: Yeah, so I was born in Los Angeles and most of my life I lived in Southern California. I lived in a town called Norwalk. It's right by Long Beach, it's right by Compton. It's mostly Hispanic and Black people, a lot of Blacks live there. Yeah, I lived with my mom and my dad; I have a younger brother named Carlos and my little sister named Camila. I'm married now. My husband's from Bolivia. His name is Rony, and we have three kids.

CG: Can you tell me a little bit more about growing up in California?

GH: Yeah, so growing up, I had a pretty good childhood. I have family on both my mom and dad's side in California. We were always surrounded by kids. My mom also babysat.

CG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GH: So, she also took care of kids. So we were constantly – we were very active. We would go to parks a lot. There's a lot of activities, there's a lot to do over there.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So, yeah, there was, like, festivals, and there's, you know, like any kind of activity, like community, anything that's going on, we would always be there. The cities are also like very close, so even though we're from Norwalk, we would go to Bellflower and Paramount, and Downey –

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: – and all of these surrounding cities. And my parents had a lot of friends over there that were very active, you know, with birthday parties and stuff like that. So I feel like, I don't know, when I look back and I think about my childhood, I just remember that we were just always busy and we were always doing stuff. It's a huge difference when we moved over here. [Laughter]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: Yeah.

CG: Do you want to elaborate on that difference a little more?

GH: Yeah so, [chuckles] the thing is, when we moved here, we moved here because my family's LDS [members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints].

CG: Okay.

GH: And they were looking to get out of California just because of the neighborhood, like it started getting pretty bad.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: We were looking for – we were going to move to a different part in California, then my mom thought about going to Arizona. And everything was all set so we could go to Arizona. We had a house set that we were going to move into, everything was all set, but immigration got really, really bad in, like, 2007 –

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: – which was when we moved. It got so bad that they deported the people that were living in the house that were gonna move into and my parents didn't have papers.

CG: Okay.

GH: So we had everything in the U-Haul. This was like two days before our move.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So everything was in the U-Haul and we had already given notice in the house that we lived in over there, and they were like, “Well... yeah, it’s too dangerous for you to move over here.” So, we were homeless [laughter]. And we didn’t know what to do, so my mom contacted a lady that she knew from here. She’s my uncle’s ex-wife.

CG: Okay.

GH: So, someone we didn’t have any communication with, and it was just a huge coincidence because she had talked to my aunt that week and she was just kinda like, “Why don’t you talk to Sandra and go to Utah?” And my mom was just kind of like, “...Okay.” [Laughter]

CG: [Laughter]

GH: We didn’t have any like options. So yeah, that’s how we came to Utah in a U-Haul and homeless, but that was only for like a week [laughter].

CG: [Laughter.] And then you found a place, right?

GH: Yeah, yeah.

CG: Gotcha.

GH: Yeah, we found a place. Everything worked out, but we were alone. We didn’t have any family here, the only person that we knew was my uncle’s ex-wife and they were married for like a month –

CG: Oh [laughter].

GH: – or two. So yeah, that was it. I feel like because we had a lot of family and a lot of friends over there, like here, we were, like, completely alone. Like on weekends, we didn’t go out, we didn’t – we were just kinda very isolated. It was different, and then it was like culture shock. In California, I wasn’t seen different. I wasn’t different.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: Everyone spoke Spanish and English. It was weird if you wouldn’t speak Spanish. It was just kinda like people would point a finger at you if you didn’t speak Spanish. Here, I remember my first day of school, I came back and my mom was kinda like, “How was it?” And I was like, “I feel like a bean in a bowl of rice.”

CG: [Chuckles.]

GH: Like, that’s exactly how I felt. I was different, I spoke different. People told me I had an accent, which I don’t hear it. But I don’t know, it was just, it was a huge culture shock. Huge. And then there was cows.

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: I had never seen a cow in my life [laughter] But there was cows, there used to be cows over by like the Dixie Drive and Sunset.

CG: Okay.

GH: There's BioLife [Plasma Services] now, but before when I moved here, there used to be cows, just random cows there.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: And we lived in Canyon Pointe, so Canyon Pointe's like right down there in Dixie Drive.

CG: Oh.

GH: [Laughter.] But, yeah, it was just different.

CG: Thank you. Can you maybe describe your favorite religious or cultural traditions that you grew up with?

GH: Yeah, so I grew up Mormon. I grew up LDS. My dad converted when he was fourteen in Mexico, and then my mom converted when she got married to my dad. Being Mormon in California is, I mean, we would go to church on Sundays. It was frowned upon to drink coffee, so I didn't, you know like – And I always felt bad, I felt super guilty because my dad, he was Mormon, like I said, he converted when he was fourteen, and he went on a mission and he did what he had to do, but before he got married to my mom he changed a little. So my dad would drink, and my dad would drink coffee, and occasionally he would smoke, and I felt like guilt. We all grew up – my siblings and my mom, we felt like this guilt of like this secret we had to protect so they won't find out that we weren't Mormon-Mormon. And yeah, it was just like a part of us, but it didn't define us.

When we moved here, I had a huge identity crisis because either you're Hispanic or you're Mormon. It was weird when it was both. Like I said, I wasn't like a "Molly-Mormon," like, I wasn't, "Oh my gosh, I would carry around my scriptures and go seminary." I was forced to go to seminary. My friends – I've never had a Mormon friend. Just kidding, I had one when I was seventeen.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: I made a friend [laughter].

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: But it was, like you couldn't – like, you had to be either or. Like Hispanic people, Mexican people are not Mormon. And then with us, being alone in St. George, all we had was church.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: Our community, like my mom's friends, they were all from church. Like, we didn't know anyone outside of church. In school, I feel like I had to be "Gabby, the girl from L.A." 'cause, obviously, that was kind of a label in itself.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: Then, when I would go to church, I had to be different. I had to change the way I talked, I had to, I don't know. My friends, there was only guys at church because it was really small. It wasn't like a ward, it was like a little branch.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: And there were no other girls there, so I was [chuckles] –.

CG: [Chuckles].

GH: So, I moved here when I was thirteen, so I was already part of the young men and the young women program, and I was surrounded by like nine guys, like nine young men. And they would be at school with me, but they would see, like, the difference. You know?

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: Like church Gabby and outside Gabby. So, yeah, everything that we would do, you know, like holidays and stuff, like everything would involve church. Outside of church, we still go back to California, we still have a lot of fun when we're there. It's different because – and then again, because back then, I was very active in the church. I was still trying to go and try to do good, but I would still carry around this internal guilt because outside, when I would go with my family, everyone's Catholic and they're huge party animals.

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: And they like to celebrate differently. Whenever we would be around family, you know, I would change, I would be different. And I don't know, it was just that guilt, but we do celebrate, like my family is still Mexican and I feel like the Mexican culture has a lot to do with the Catholic culture.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So, especially around this time in April whether it's with... what is it, the Holy Week?

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: La Semana Santa, on Fridays, we don't eat meat and that's like a Catholic thing. And even though I grew up Mormon, at my house we still don't eat meat on Fridays.

CG: Okay.

GH: Why? I don't know. My mom grew up that way [Laughter].

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: And she'll be like, "Oh, I don't know, I'm just craving the food." You know, like nopales, cactus.

CG: Okay.

GH: That's like um – cactus, like a fruit grows in and there's like thorns, I've heard people say it's cow food. Like, it's the food cows in the fields.

CG: Okay.

GH: You know what cactus I'm talkin' about? It's not the one that's like standing.

CG: Like the prickly pear?

GH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CG: Okay.

GH: On Fridays, we eat that a lot, we eat you know like shrimp, we just don't eat meat. But, yeah, sorry I'm babbling. [Laughter.]

CG: It's okay. You're actually answering a lot of our questions, so –. Did you have, like, a favorite religious or cultural tradition within the church or Mexican heritage?

GH: Christmas.

CG: Christmas.

GH: Christmas is for sure my favorite. So there was an experience that I had at church that – this was years ago. So, I haven't been to church in like five years. Before, I remember – so normally, the church I went to was LDS, but it was a Spanish –, , like everyone who went there was Hispanic.

CG: Okay.

GH: We would do like the activities for like Christmas and have this dinner and sometimes they would take like this piñata, ... because everyone was Hispanic, obviously, we celebrated in a very Hispanic way, right, like at church..

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: There was a time, though, where they wanted to make it grow and they started bringing in a bunch of white people.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: I know that white people celebrate it a little bit differently, which is fine, but it's a lot more like quieter, it's a lot more like, you know, singing, like nice "Silent Night" songs and it was different. So normally, like at church there would be a dance at the end, and Santa would come and people would start dancing. When other people came that weren't aware of the culture and I feel like that wanted to change, and someone even said that we celebrated wrong.

CG: Oh!

GH: 'Cause Christmas was, you know, like it had to do with the birth of Jesus Christ and it's something that's supposed to be reverent and something that's supposed to be, you know, like you're supposed to kind of remember him and remember his birth. It's not something that was supposed to be made into a party. So, I don't know, when that happened, obviously, like I was mad and I was like this is just another way of trying to whitewash like our beliefs and our culture. I remember I was talking to the bishop at the time and I was like, "You know, this is a form of gentrification." [Laughter.]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: I was like, "They're trying to gentrify, you know, like our beliefs and stuff," like our culture, I feel like that's what they were trying to remove. Yeah, the party and stuff. Since I've been out from church, then we do our thing, it's a party. Like, we do remember the birth of Jesus Christ, I still believe in God, but it's more like, I feel like it's something that should be celebrated, like you know, that's how we express ourselves. And yeah, we can have our little renevanant moments, but Christmas that, it's a huge party.

CG: So, you mentioned that you haven't been to church in like five years.

GH: Mm-hmm.

CG: Can you tell us why you stopped going, or —?

GH: [Laughter.] Okay, so like, I don't know if you're too familiar with the LDS church.

CG: A little.

GH: So, we have the Book of Mormon, right? We have the Book of Mormon, we have the Bible. So, the Bible – this is what I’ve been told my whole life. The Bible takes place in Jerusalem and it’s over there, on the other side of the world. Well, the Book of Mormon, it’s placed in the Americas, and in the Americas, like, back in the fifteen hundreds, like back before Christ.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: There was native people here. And then, in the Americas, – and that ‘there’s a map, right? So, I have been told my whole life that the Book of Mormon is a book about my people, about people in the Americas, so all of the Native Americans from, you know, North America all the way down to South America. There’s even tours that they do in Cancún [Mexico] and Guatemala where they narrate passages of the Book of Mormon and they show people this is like the lake where they came and they prayed, and blah blah blah, and they got baptized. This is the lake. There’s literally stuff like that that supposedly the Book of Mormon took place over there. It says in the Book of Mormon that there’s two different sides, two different people, right?. So there’s the Nephites and they were white, which I don’t know where Native Americans were white, but they were white.

CG: [Chuckles.]

GH: And then the Lamanites were brown. And then, eventually all of the Nephites died, and the Lamanites, they just preserved and those are the Native Americans that we know today.

CG: Okay.

GH: There’s a part, though, in the Book of Mormon where it says that they turned brown because they were wicked. And apparently, now all of the Native Americans, all of the brown people, we carry that pigment in our skin because our ancestors were wicked. Sorry [emotional], and the thing is like, in the church, even though they’re like [breaking voice], “Oh, yeah, the Book of Mormon, it’s about your people,” whatever. There’s always like that, like the white people are good and the brown people are bad. And within the church, there were just little occasions where – Back when I moved here, there wasn’t enough members in the Spanish ward to just be Spanish, so we were mixed with both of them. And I remember one of my first Sundays in Utah, there was this boy that was a little bit older than me – he was about sixteen, seventeen, I was thirteen – he was talking about that, and he was just kind of like, “Well, let’s just remember the Book of Mormon, it was the Lamanites, blah blah blah, but, essentially, they were wicked. One can turn good...” like they can get baptized and they can, like, be good, but we’re always gonna carry that, ‘cause we literally carry the pigment on our skin. So anyway, it was just kinda like little things like that. I feel like that’s just kind of how it started, right?

And then, so, I have an uncle who I love. He's like my dad. When I was little, I used to call him my dad, but he's gay.

CG: Okay.

GH: And my uncle adopted a little boy. My uncle ... he's my dad's brother, so he converted when he was – if my dad was fourteen, then my uncle must have been – eight.

CG: Okay.

GH: So, he ... his whole life, he was Mormon. He went through his own struggles, and then he adopted a little boy. He didn't know anything else, but the LDS church, so when he adopted this little boy, he took my cousin to church, to the Mormon church, and even though he wasn't able to participate, he wasn't able to pray, you know. He had his partner, but he was just kind of like, "Well, I'm the one living in sin," this is my uncle's thoughts were like, "I'm the one living in sin, but I'm not gonna let my son kind of like get lost." Right?

My cousin got baptized when he was eight, he continued to go to church, my uncle would send him. My cousin turned twelve. When my cousin turned twelve, my uncle would send him to Mutual [Improvement Association], which is like the activities that they have on Tuesday or Wednesday during the week. The thing is that when the boys turn twelve, they have the opportunity to get something called the priesthood. And thing is that the prophet during that time, the prophet made a rule that whoever lived in a household with homosexual parents wasn't allowed to either get baptized or get the priesthood if they were boys. And I was just kinda like, "Why? Like, why?" You know, like what – you know, like in the Mormon church, there's like Articles of Faith where they have kind of like – it's what they believe. Right? The second Article of Faith says that – [clinking noise] Oh, I'm sorry, I know it in Spanish, I'm gonna translate it in a second in English – it kind of says that we will be judged for our own sins and not for Adam's transgression. Which means like if my dad commits a sin, it's not gonna fall on me, because we're each gonna be judged for our own sins, right? So, I was just kinda like, "Well" – and I was like fifteen, I was like sixteen at the time and my cousin was twelve. And then, my uncle kinda had this conversation where he was just kinda like, "I'm not going to church and my son's not going to church because it isn't fair."

So, I went to church and I asked, and I was just kind of like, "I don't understand this rule, like what– If we believe in the Articles of Faith and we believe in the second Article of Faith, then why can't my cousin get the priesthood?" And their answer was just kind of like, "Well, God knows everything," and "Pray about it, read the scriptures. And we don't have an answer, but you just have to have faith and. like. keep on being faithful to the church." And then, I don't know, like that to me, that was my first turning point where I just kinda like, "Uh." I don't know, I was just always told that being gay was a sin and I didn't like to hear it, but I was just kind of – it made me feel bad for my uncle –

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: – because I was like, “Oh my god, my uncle’s a sinner.” There, when that was going on, I was like well, why? I just couldn’t understand why does it matter who my uncle loves. Even like my cousin’s having consequences because my uncle fell in love with a man? It was just – I don’t know, that was just different. So as the years went on, they took that rule off, and I was just kinda like, “Okay, wait minute, if this was so important, then why was it like not okay then, and it’s okay now?” And then they continued to change like these little rules. Whenever I would ask questions, there weren’t any answers.

And then I kept on feeling this way. I messed up according to my religion. I messed up pretty bad [chuckles]. I had sex before marriage and that’s like a huge [mimics explosion noise], you’re going to hell [laughter]. And my mom found out and I didn’t know how to redeem myself, so I decided to go on a mission. And I went on a mission feeling all of these feelings where... I was Mormon and I wanted to believe in the Book of Mormon even though they said I was bad because I was brown and like my ancestors were bad. You know, I kept on feeling like, “Ehh,” but I wanted to redeem myself because I had messed up and I went on a mission. And that was like the worst mistake I had ever done in my whole entire life, and if I had any regret, I think that that is my biggest regret because after, when I came back I didn’t want to go to church, I was like depressed, I didn’t want anything to do with the church. But then, I got boyfriend, and I had sex before marriage again, and then I got pregnant. Then I was pregnant and I was just kind of like, “Uh, what am I going to teach my son?” And the only thing that I knew was that, so I went back to church and I tried so hard to redeem myself. And I went through so many humiliations. I had to tell my story in a panel of eighteen men, grown white men, who wanted details.

ES: What?

GH: And they were going to decide if I was worthy enough to continue being a member of the LDS church or they were going to revoke my membership. And that’s like revoking, like getting excommunicated, it’s like the worst thing that could happen to a Mormon person, ever. But I had to show that... I had repentance. And I did it for my son, I did it for my family. I was just kinda like, “I don’t know anything else. If it’s not this, then where else am I gonna go?” My family was very active in the church. My husband had just barely gotten baptized. So, I did it, we got married in the temple, we got sealed, you know, the whole shebang. I’ve been through it all. And then I was just kinda like this is B.S! [Laughter.]

CG: [Chuckles].

GH: I feel like I’m going through all of this and it’s a lie. They don’t like us, they don’t – The Book of Mormon, I feel like, is just a way of manipulating other cultures. It’s just a way for them to get their tithing. I don’t know, it’s a way for them to control, saying coffee’s bad, alcohol’s bad, if you have sex before marriage you’re going to hell! [Laughter] My goodness! If you’re gay, like if you love someone else, ‘oh, you’re done for. I don’t know, like, it’s all a lie.

And then, I read the CES letter [Church Educational System] and I just started researching about the church history, how it came about, where it started, and 'I'm like, "Oh my gosh." I feel like, I don't know, the Mormon church judges other religions like super bad, when where did they come from? Like, you know? It's just, I don't know, it's just, yeah. Anyway, that's why I left, and I don't believe what they believe. I believe in God, but I believe God, like my God is not the same God, I feel like. I don't think God hates gay people. I don't think God hates, you know, people who have sex before marriage. I don't know, I feel like all of that is just a way to control, it's just control and it's just like racist homophobic men who create these rules to continue to control. But yeah, I'm happier now [laughter].

CG: [Laughter.] Well, thank you for telling us. I think we're gonna switch gears a little bit.

GH: [Laughter.]

CG: But feel free to elaborate more on that if you want. So, what's been your experience with the broader St. George community since you've been here? Like –

GH: Yeah, so, well, when I moved here there was only like ten Hispanic kids at my school. When I got here, my friends weren't just at my school, I had friends in Dixie and Pineview and Hurricane, and we would all hang out. Like, I knew everyone, of the Hispanic kids. And we were kind of like, "You know this person, you know this person, you know I knew this person." The soccer games, especially, at Dixie, the soccer games, they were cool [laughter].

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: As an adult, like, the Hispanic community has grown so much. I feel like as an adult, now, we can see like there's like this festival that they do for like the Spanish radio station and it's like packed! It's huge. I feel like a couple years ago, it wouldn't have been like that. And each year, they do it every year, each year it continues to grow a lot more.

I'm in real estate now, and my niche is the Hispanic community. I help a lot of Hispanic families get into homes. And yeah, it's growing for sure. It's a lot bigger, there's a lot more resources than there were before, like Spanish therapists, which I just barely found out a couple weeks ago there's a Hispanic – she's from Mexico, she has her degree, she's a full-on therapist. Yeah, there's just a lot more stuff for the Latino population here.

CG: Is it getting closer to what you saw in California or still a long way to go?

GH: No, we – [laughter]. It's still a long way to go! Yeah no, we're not there yet, there's still a lot of things that St. George has to work on. But it's growing for sure, we're headed to that direction.

CG: How would you describe your relationship to the white Americans here?

GH: Pretty well, I feel like. I see women a little bit better than I see men, just because of my experiences, and not all, just some. I do – obviously, I do work with a lot of white people, you know, it's great. We get along great. Once we start having conversations, though, or once they start asking me about, you know, the question, "Where are you from?" and I'm like "California." "No, where are you from from?" and I'm just like oh, dude, "Where are you from from?" [Laughter.] I feel like those little things and I understand that people don't do it on purpose. I'm aware, but I can't help that it bothers me a little bit when people say it like, "I don't see color. Like, you, to me are just like..." and I'm like, "Dude, see color. Like, I'm brown, it's okay, you know." I feel, it's just like those little things that I feel. Like, right away I, personally, start putting my barriers up and I'm just like, "Okay, I like you. You're nice and I know it's just ignorance." they don't do it on purpose, or because they're trying to be racist, but it's – I feel like once they start to see me different, then that's when I'm like, okay, we're different and we're not gonna click as much as I'd like to 'cause we're different. So, yeah, I feel like it's only with some people. I've had white friends, and they're pretty cool, and they're just kinda like, "Eh, I don't care," you know. It's there and it's important, but it's not. Like, being Mexican is a part of me, like it's not me. Like, I don't have the big ol' Mexican flag on my forehead.

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: [Laughter] You know. Yeah, it depends, I guess, on the person [laughter].

CG: So you kinda mentioned, I guess, what we would call, like, microaggressions, like the "Where are you really from?" Have you experienced other racist or prejudiced behavior here?

GH: Oh, yeah, of course, all the time! [Laughter.]

CG: What was that like?

GH: [Laughter.] Like well, you know, school when I was going to school, that was one thing. I feel like kids are mean and they kinda try — how do I explain this? So I had this experience at school once, I went to Snow Canyon. And in Snow Canyon, sometimes like the boys would eat lunch and go out and play soccer. So, I don't remember if this was during lunch time when they would go out and play soccer or P.E. [physical education] or something where they were playing soccer. But someone in the boys, they decided it would be a good idea to play like Mexicans vs. whites and they were playing and everything was fine. And I remember I got out, and I was walking around with my friends and a white boy called a Mexican boy a "beaner" and they started getting a little bit aggressive. And all of the Mexican kids, and even the girls that were outside, we were walking around, we were all baffled. We were like, "Excuse me?!" And someone, I think it was my brother, who yelled, "You mess with the bean, you get the whole burrito!" [Laughter.]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: And it became, it was huge. *St. George News* even talked about it.

CG: Really?

GH: This was back in 2010, I think. But, it became like a huge thing, like everyone was talking about whites vs. Mexicans and that all started with Snow Canyon. [Laughter.]

CG: [Chuckles.]

GH: They suspended all of the boys, thankfully, I wasn't suspended, but they suspended everyone that was there. And they were just kinda like, "Oh, we know this is racist and you know, we know this is racism, but we have to suspend you guys to remove them from the situation." They suspended my brother for two weeks. The boy had to get a restraining order against every single boy that was like there that day. They moved him schools, the parents were like, "Oh my gosh, it's because – We understand that what he did wasn't right, but Mexicans are so aggressive, they're just so — it's just like in their blood. Did you see how they all attacked?" And they did, once he said that, all the white boys they moved, they were like, "Oh, we're not a part of—" and all of the Mexican kids were like, they were offended! [Laughter.]

CG: Right.

GH: And I'm just kinda like, "Well —" Anyways, that was kinda like in school, you know, where there was little incidents that would happen like that. There was little microaggressions with teachers singling kids out, saying like, "Oh, it's okay, we're friends, right? Like, it's okay if I say that. Like, it's okay if I tell you to go back to your country, right? We're friends?" So then, at that point we were just kind of like, "Ha-ha," like it was — we would try not to get offended because if we got offended, then we were like sensitive and we weren't cool because we were not playing that same game, I guess.

As an adult, I feel like it still happens, it's still there all the time. I've noticed that we can't make a mistake. My sister got a dog, it was a puppy, it was a husky, she was really, really small. But every time you open the door the dog would run out, and then, so we would have to go and then chase her down. Well, this one time this lady came up to us — because I was pregnant, I was super pregnant and I was over there trying to chase the dog around. And I understand, the dog shouldn't have been out, like the dog ran out, we were trying to chase it, like stuff happens, you know. It was a mistake. But, I feel like a mistake, here, in St. George, being brown is like, like you can't make a mistake, you know?

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: The lady comes up to me and she was just like, "You know your dog is not supposed to be out." and I'm like, "Yes, I'm aware, that's why we're trying to catch it." "Well, do

you have a leash? Can you afford a leash? I have a leash at my house I can bring if you need a leash.” and I’m just kinda like, “Ugh, lady, it’s okay, you know?” And I don’t know, she was just kind of like, “Ugh, ever since you people —” and I know she wasn’t referring to me and my family. She’s like, “Ever since you people moved into this neighborhood,” she was older and this was in Dixie Downs. And from my understanding, back a long time ago, Dixie Downs used to be an area where people could have horses and there was a lot of like cowboys and stuff, so we lived around that area. And she still had — her house still had a big ol’ like horse thing.

CG: Like a corral or something?

GH: Like, she still had horses in the back. So yeah, she was just kinda like, “Ever since you people moved in, the neighborhood hasn’t been the same.” There had been a lot of kids helping me, because, like I said I was super pregnant. There were kids like running around.

There’s little looks at the store if my daughter’s crying, it’s not just like “Oh, a baby’s crying, let me just kind of look.” It’s kind of like, I don’t know, it’s different, it’s weird, you feel it. Like, if I’m — I speak Spanish to my kids. At home we only speak Spanish. And they’re just kind of like, “Oh, do they not understand?” like, you know.

I took my kids to swimming lessons, here, at the university, here, there’s swimming lessons during the summer. And I felt like I’d taken my son, and my son’s teacher was amazing. He was like this really good guy, and my son only spoke Spanish, but he did really well with the swim lessons. So my problem was these teachers were just kind of like, they wouldn’t teach my daughter. They were just kind of like there, they were like squirting little toys. And I just kind of like, ugh, I want her to swim, like she knows how to swim. I’ve taught her how to swim, so like I would just kind of want her — That was my issue, right? So, when I go talk to the director, she was just kinda like, “Okay, we’ll talk.” And then, when the teacher came, she was like this young girl, and she was like, “Well, it’s ‘cause I don’t understand her. It’s ‘cause we don’t speak the same language.” And it’s not what you say, it’s how you say it. And I’m just kinda like, “Okay, you clearly have some type of feeling,” and I was like, “It’s fine; she understands English. If you tell her to kick, she’ll kick.” And I was trying to explain that and she was like, “No, she just sits there and speaks Spanish — like, I don’t understand her.” I was just kind of like ugh, girl, like just say, “We’re in America!” [Chuckles.]

I don’t know, but it’s just like those little experiences that I feel like we still have to deal with. And yeah, we’re not allowed to get offended, we’re not allowed to say anything because then we’re worse. But hopefully it’ll change one day.

CG: I think you touched on that. So, to rewind a little bit can you — you touched on school a bit, but can you tell me more about school? Or I think you mentioned this before, that you went to some college, if you wanna talk about that a little?

GH: Yeah, school here? Yeah, so I moved here in — I was in eighth grade, in the middle of eighth grade. I went to Snow Canyon here. I graduated from Snow Canyon High School. I enrolled here back when it was like Dixie State College and then it became a university. I was studying to be a criminologist. During high school, I was in a program, it's called Explore Program and it's from the sheriff's office. They don't exist now, unfortunately, but that's what I was doing during high school. I wanted to be an FBI agent, so my plan was to apply to the sheriff's office, once I turned eighteen, as a civilian reserve, I could work at the jail, which I did. Once I turned twenty-one, they were going to send me up to the academy, I was going to become a deputy, and I was gonna work at the jail. I was eventually going to do patrol. Then I was going to apply to go to the FBI Academy while I got my criminology degree here. Yeah, so, everything went according to plan until I decided to go on a mission.

My plans changed a little bit. After I came back from my mission, I was still studying criminology. And then I got pregnant, so then I dropped out. When my son was eight months old, I enrolled again, but I decided to get a business degree. FBI wasn't in the plans, obviously, anymore, with a kid. I enrolled in business and I'm just a few shy credits away from my bachelor's, but then I dropped out again because then I got pregnant again. And I did come to school throughout my pregnancy.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: But then, I was just kinda like, "Okay, I'm going to get my degree as soon as the baby's born, like after the baby's born." But, I wanted to become like an entrepreneur and it was a lot of money. And I already had a family with two kids and it was just kind of like, "I don't need a degree to start a business."

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So, yeah, that's where that ended. And then after a little bit, I decided to get my real estate license. So, I just took some online classes for that and yeah, that's where I'm at now. I have my real estate license.

ES: Can I interject with a question?

CG: Yeah.

ES: I was just wondering since you mentioned your husband is from Bolivia, is there anything from his culture that you practice as a family?

GH: Food mostly. His food is different, so – I don't know if you're too familiar, but Mexico is over in North America, Bolivia's all the way down in South America right next to Brazil.

CG: Okay.

GH: And the area that my husband's from, it has — so, he's right next to Brazil. Bolivia is kinda like divided into two sections. The northern section is closer to Peru, so Bolivians have a lot of Peruvian culture up there. My husband is from like right next to Brazil, so it's very tropical, a lot of his words are different. So we speak, we both speak Spanish, but it's a different kind of Spanish. His Spanish involves a lot of Portuguese. My husband speaks Spanish and Portuguese. But, he's alone here, ...all his family is back in Bolivia. He came here to study on a student visa and I snatched him up. [Laughter.]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: So, yeah, there's not like a whole lot that we do. He has integrated more into the Mexican culture because of my family. But, yeah, mostly it's just food. They eat a lot of cheese and I love cheese.

CG: [Laughter.]

ES: I also wanted to ask, kind of back-pedaling a little bit, kinda what your relationship to your family was like after you left the church.

GH: So my dad left first.

CG: Okay.

GH: Which we saw coming. My dad left first, and he wouldn't convince us to leave the church, but he had his ideas. And, we would do, like, every Monday, my mom really wanted to do something called "Family Home Evening."

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: Where we would kinda have these little mini lessons and a little game, and it was more like a family kinda thing. During the lessons, oof, things would get heated with my dad because we knew he didn't want to go to church anymore, but I didn't know that he just didn't believe.

I was the next to go and my mom, my mom kind of saw — she was just kind of like, "Well, what are you gonna teach your kids?" Like, "What are you teaching your kids? You need to set a good example." Like, you know, she wasn't, she didn't completely shut me out, but she was very disappointed. She was super disappointed in me. She would talk to my husband and be kind of like, "Well, you convince her," but my husband was kinda like a convert. Like, he knew, he believed in God, but he wasn't like super into it.

And then, after I read the CES letter, I found it on YouTube, like the summary of it, in Spanish and I made my mom listen, and my mom was having, you know, her own little doubts. There was little things that she was seeing. Before my mom left, she stopped completely, like not paying her tithing and she was just kind of like, "Well, if I'm gonna

like donate this money, I would rather donate it to a charity.” Like, give my money to a charity and not continue to give it to the church.

And then, we didn’t know, but my brother moved back to California and he was supposedly going to church in California, but he left and when we had talked and stuff, he was like, “Gabi, I stopped completely believing” when he was about sixteen years old. And he told me his experience, and I was like, “Oh, my gosh, dude! Like, when did you get so smart?” [Laughs].

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: He stood up to the bishop. He stood up to the stake president, which is a person that is a little bit higher up. He stood up to them; he was like, “Honestly, I don’t believe this is the only true church.” He’s like, “I’m sorry, I don’t believe.” And they were baffled and they were just kind of like, “Oh.” Like, “Okay?” But yeah, I guess he continued to pretend for a long time until we found out that he was like long gone. When my mom left, my sister left, too. And at the beginning my sister was just kind of disappointed, I guess, in her family. She would say little comments like, “Well, I’m not gonna go to church by myself without my family.” But then, yeah, she left, too. We get a lot of visitors from church, still, trying to convince us and my family’s like straight up like, “No, we’re not gonna go back. We just don’t believe. It’s not a people thing, it’s not a faith thing, we just don’t believe in the Book of Mormon, and if we don’t believe in the Book of Mormon then we can’t believe in anything else, so —” [Chuckles.] Yeah.

CG: You mentioned it a couple times, now, can you explain what the CES letter is?

GH: The CES letter? [Laughter.]

CG: If you don’t wanna, I can look it up later.

GH: Yeah, no. The CES letter, it’s a book made by a guy who was a scholar at BYU [Brigham Young University], I think. And first, he was tryin’ to get faith, like research — ‘cause supposedly the Book of Mormon — so, there’s a lot of, supposably, scientific truths. Like scientifically, so supposably, Native Americans came from — or like the Nephites and the Lamanites, they came from Jerusalem in a boat and in that boat there was a compass. So when they found, like Joseph Smith, found the Book of Mormon, there was supposed to be a compass and the Book of Mormon was gold plates that nobody else could see except for him, that was written in a language that was used since before Christ was born, that only he could understand by like the gift of God.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: He could only understand it. He translated those like gold plates and went to the book — like he translated to English, right? Which, I had no idea. So someone once asked, like, where are the gold plates? Like, if they found it in New York, under a rock, right? Like, it was there in New York. Where are they? Well, someone said that an angel came down

from heaven and they took it. They took a sword, they took the gold plates, which is like the original Book of Mormon, and they took a compass that the Jerusalem people used to come here to the Americas.

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So, like not even on earth, right? Like, it's not even on here. So, there's a lot of scholars that still go and they try to like look up like proof, you know, proof that all of this is real. So, this guy went and did his research and found out that Joseph Smith was a complete conman and there's proof. So, the CES letter, it's so real and it's just silly how – like it just makes you see the silliness of what Mormon church teaches. And it's just like an eye-opener. And it's very, I don't wanna say like convincing, it's more like logical. So, when I showed it to my mom and my mom's just kinda listening and there's proof of who Joseph Smith was exactly, and without Joseph Smith, there wouldn't be an LDS church. So, yeah, basically that's what it is. There's like summaries, 'cause the book is kind of long, but there's summaries that you can read and it's just like, "Wow!"

CG: Okay.

GH: Mind-blowing [chuckles], but yeah.

ES: I was wondering, also, if you could tell me a bit more about where you went on your mission and why you feel so much regret about it?

GH: Yeah. [Laughter.]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: So, I went to Texas, I went to Fort Worth. I loved it. I loved the people there, I love Texas. If I could move anywhere in the United States, 'cause I would never move out, I would either go to California or Texas. It's full of Hispanic people over there. It's different than California, though, but it's full of Mexicans, so it makes you feel right at home. The reason why I regret it, though, is because I had an identity crisis, a huge identity crisis because like I said, you're either Mexican or you're Mormon. And I feel like Mexicans, and you still see it now, like you have to change and kind of like reject your culture a little bit in order to be Mormon. And we see that a lot. Oh, with Samoans. You know how Samoans, they have their tribal tattoos and the stuff that makes them, well in the Mormon church they tell them you can't. Like, "Tattoos are a huge no-no, and even though in your culture it means something, like you have to put God first and you have to put us first, and you have to kinda like reject that." So that's how I felt it is with the Hispanic culture in the Mormon church.

So, because I had this huge identity crisis before I left on my mission. During my mission, it's just like, it's like I don't know, being Mormon on steroids.

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: You have to like eat, breathe, sleep everything like the Book of Mormon. Obviously, like it's something like you teach and you try to convert people into your religion and I wasn't completely convinced in the beginning. So, then I had to pretend that I was and then I had to meet these people and these people would have all of these questions that I couldn't answer, and then I felt like I didn't believe, and I missed home, I missed my life. I missed – there was like these rules where like you can't be alone, being a missionary, you can't be alone at all except to go to the bathroom and your companion has to be outside the bathroom. And I felt like I was suffocating and I couldn't breathe. And I felt like a phony, like I felt fake. I felt like I didn't belong, like I would rather be in Texas as a civilian and not as a missionary. I felt embarrassed. We had to knock doors and I mean, I'm pretty shy. Like I'm outgoing, but I'm shy. I have to kinda push myself to be a little bit outgoing. And knocking doors, talking about religion in Texas, where it's like the Bible belt!

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: It was just, I just felt embarrassed. I felt, I don't know, and then most of my companions were white, so they didn't understand the culture. And then I wasn't; I only had one companion who was Mexican and I felt like that was my best — those three months I was with her were my best, like it flowed very smoothly. After, I had companions that like they just like didn't understand. They started with their little microaggression. Judging people who we would teach, and we would teach in Spanish. And they were just kinda like, "Oh, it's because, you know, like their culture," and I was just kinda like, "Their culture is my culture."

CG: Mm-hmm.

GH: So, yeah, when I came back, I was just kinda like, "Ugh, I'm exhausted. I don't want to be fake." I felt super fake. I can't even explain, like how, I felt like a hypocrite. I was a huge hypocrite, and yeah that. Like, so much of it messes with you, and yeah, but yeah, that's why I regret it.

CG: Do you have any more questions? Okay.

Our last question for you then is, what would you like people to know about yourself or your community?

GH: Well, being Hispanic is so beautiful. I feel like it's such a beautiful thing. Every culture has, you know, their beauty. [Laughter.]

CG: [Laughter.]

GH: You know what I mean? The beauty of it. And I love my culture. I love who I am. I'm not the walking flag, though. I'm not the walking country, so my experience as an individual is not the same as Eva's experience as an individual. Mexicans are not the

same as Salvadorians and Guatemalans and Peruvians. There's different countries. We're all Hispanic, we're all Latinos, but we each have, you know, our own bits and pieces. And just because two people are Mexicans doesn't mean they're the same.

CG: Right.

GH: There're similarities, but, you know. I just, I really just hope people can just see us as individuals and embrace like all of who we are. But yeah, the community's growing and we're seeing a lot of people from all over the place. What I love about California is that it's so diverse and you get to know like different people from different countries. And I really just hope that St. George can get to that place, and, you know, that white people who've been here for generations don't get this like territorial like this attitude about them, like that, "We were here first" or, you know, like, "You know, ugh, St. George is growing and it's bad. Like, go somewhere else." You know, 'cause it's just, we're all immigrants, all of us, even white people. Like, we're all immigrants, except for the Native Americans. So, instead of having this you versus me, like your culture versus my culture, I feel like it'll just be nicer if we could embrace and get to know one another and see that we're different, like that we're different. Yeah, that's what I just hope people [chuckles], you know, understand.

CG: Well, thank you. If you don't have any other thoughts, we'll end the recording. Then we just have a couple other things to follow up with.

GH: Okay.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]