

Gloria Sosa: [00:02](#) Okay. So, um, we were talking about when you met this other girl who was at the office with you at the Right, same time when you needed help to bypass that, the social security number requirement to apply to university. And were you applied to Cal State or to, uh, uc, you remember?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [00:23](#) You know, I think I had already learned that I could not afford anything else and that I was going to, I was gonna do this and I was gonna go to Cal State L.A. because Cal State LA is close by and I had limited resources, so I didn't look into anything else from the moment I started at ELAC I knew, I knew that's where I'm gonna go because that's what I can afford. Um, my family, again, I'm gonna keep bringing up money, but my family didn't have it, so. Right. I would like, I could say, you know, I don't know, mom, help me out with whatever.

Gloria Sosa: [00:56](#) Right. So then, um, what did this girl tells you? What, what's the story there? What happened that day?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [01:06](#) So I told her, um, I say, you know, I don't have a social security number. Like very, I was ashamed. I I recall that moment. Now I was, and I, I said it very quietly so that no one else hears <laugh> <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [01:19](#) Right. You dunno who's watching, who's listening.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [01:23](#) And she was like, okay, no, don't worry. Like she, like, you know, type in the zeros. Cause I think all you needed to do was do zeros. Like they had already programmed it mm-hmm. <affirmative> so that it would let you in. Um, and then.

Gloria Sosa: [01:34](#) But you didn't know these right?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [01:36](#) I didn't know that. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:37](#) Right.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [01:38](#) And she was actually transferring out to, to maybe like a UC or some kind, a better school, not a better school. I wouldn't wanna say that. Um, she had the opportunity to represent in a different space, and I think she took it mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And I admire that about her. In fact, every time I meet someone and they have the, the resources to do it, because it takes resources, I, I want them to do it, you know, um, especially, you know, they're female because, you know, we're

Gloria Sosa: [02:05](#) Right. Yes. Mm-hmm.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [02:07](#) So forth. But, um, but yeah. But she was the one who said, where are you going? And I said, well, Cal State LA. And she asked me the same question, where else are you applying? And I said, no, no, just Cal State LA. I'm going there. <laugh>. And she said, okay, uh, when are you starting? I said, well, in the summer. And she handed me what I still have, by the way, and I will probably send you guys, uh, a picture.

Gloria Sosa: [02:29](#) Please. Yes.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [02:30](#) Yeah. She handed me, uh, a AB 540, um, little flyer thing, like super small. And it had these, uh, it had this image of a boy or a girl, I don't know what it was. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> trying to go through a door. And there was a giant hand on the door, like stopping the boy right here on his face mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, um, and it said, it said, have you ever felt this way? And I was like, yeah, right now, you know, <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [02:59](#) Right.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [02:59](#) It said, um, it said like something like AB 540, you know, if you wanna know more, like meet at Tolchini's, which I had no idea what Tolchini's was.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [03:07](#) Right, right.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [03:08](#) Until I got to Cal State LA, I realized it's a coffee place. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, and it had a number, and it was, uh, it was Jose Beltran's number, who we've heard about. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, so I call, I call Jose and I said, I said, hey, you know, this is Elizabeth. Like, I, I'm go, I'm coming here. And I, you know, I've been like, encouraged to meet you and you know, I didn't know who Jose was. I didn't know he was.

Gloria Sosa: [03:34](#) Right. <laugh>.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [03:35](#) He was a peer, you know, I thought maybe he was a, a teacher or something, I don't know. So, so I called him and he was very respons responsive, and he said, yeah, you know, uh, why don't we meet at the Golden Eagle?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [03:46](#) And I was like, what is the Golden Eagle <laugh>? So, um, yeah, you know, later I found out it was at Statue right by the student store. Um, so we, I met him there and he kind of, he just told me like, look, there's a group of students here that are in, are

undocumented as well. Um, not all of them are transfer students, but some of them are. And we're meeting, we're having these meetings to see if we can form a group mm-hmm. <affirmative> like a club here on campus that, that can provide more resources that, so that we can also bring awareness to the campus, um, about our population and, and our needs. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and also create a support group. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So I was like, okay. So I think I met with like, him and five others, people that you've mentioned. Not Joanna and Josea, because she came a lot after. But, um, but George and, um, Erica, a few others, Fermin and a few others. And we, we just, I just sat there. I was more of a observer than, than active, to be honest, because I, I didn't know much about it. Um, so we sat there at Tolchini's and I just saw, I saw them in exchanging words, like they knew what they were talking about, and they, like, they had experience in, in this thing. Um, to be honest, I don't know their backgrounds. Like, I don't know if Jose had been, um, active before in, in like, in high school in some group or something, but he seemed to know what he was doing, and he seemed to be very passionate about, um, helping people like me who had no clue. Um, just be able to communicate my needs to like financial aid or admissions, you know, like to tell them who I was and what I needed, um, or the advisors. So, um, so I just listened and it might've, this might've happened repeatedly for week after week in the summer, but that was it. Like, I, I wasn't, I don't think I was buddy buddy with them yet, like, to me mm-hmm. It was all mm-hmm. Very strange <laugh>. Um.

- Gloria Sosa: [05:55](#) Because you never, this was the first time you encountered a group of undocumented students?
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [06:00](#) Yes.
- Gloria Sosa: [06:01](#) Mm. Trying to organize, right?
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [06:05](#) Yeah. Yeah. We were just at a table at outside in Tolchini's. Now it's not there anymore. I, I think, um.
- Gloria Sosa: [06:10](#) It's not.
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [06:11](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. But we were there, we were just sitting there and they, they had these conversations about things that I wasn't really understanding. Like, um, they were saying words like liaison and, um, <laugh>, you know, I don't know, petitions, and, you know, the bylaws and whatever else that, you know,

- Gloria Sosa: [06:32](#) What was going through your head when, through your mind, when you observed this group of students coming out, these conversations?
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [06:43](#) I think I felt that, I felt that we were different because, um, because growing up, I don't think I had too many, like, my, my friends at school didn't talk about things like this. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, and within my family, everybody was just so busy with their roles that no one really spoke about. Like, I wish my parents would've sat with me and said, you know what? Like, this is what your life's gonna look like until we take care of this, you know, need of getting legalized and all that. Like, none of that talk ever happened. It was just, it was just like, go to school mija, because it's good, you know, you gotta, you gotta go to school and you have to do your work and be someone in life, but to be someone in life, I needed something. <laugh>.
- Gloria Sosa: [07:31](#) They forgot to mention that. Right.
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [07:32](#) Yeah. I forgot to into that. So when I saw the, when I saw them, um, Jorge and everybody else is very much into their roots. Like they're Hispanic, Latino roots, like the music and, and the way they express themselves, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because they're not in a structured setting. They're, it was just a bunch of us just hanging out, talking about big ideas. They were, I was listening, <laugh>, <laugh>. But, um, but even that, it was like a culture clash. And so, and I was completely alone because, um, my good friend had already moved, like the, the, the guy that I told you from, from.
- Gloria Sosa: [08:04](#) Yeah.
- Elizabeth Aguil...: [08:05](#) From ELAC, he had moved to, to Las Vegas. He was gonna go to UNLV, and Mariana had, she was gone. Like, she went to UCLA and, and the other girl whose name was Cora, um, she, oh, whose name is Cora. She, she also left, like, she went somewhere else to another university. So, so what little interactions I had with them, it was nothing to what I was seeing with these people here, like being so close-bonded. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and cheerful. And they were full of life. And, and I had no friends. So I, I used every minute that I had with them, because when I was with them, I, I felt, I felt good. Like, I felt like part of something. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And I think, I think mainly at the beginning, that's how, that's what drew me to them, like their energy and the feeling that, oh, wait a minute. Like, they're like me. They are like me right here. Yeah. And so I got to know, I got to know the ways, aside from the organizing, you know, we all started bonding in a way that,

that nothing has interfered with. Like, we are, you know, we are still there. Like, if anybody needs a ride to LA, if they call me, I will go, you know, no matter how I.

Gloria Sosa: [09:17](#)

Oh, that's lovely.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [09:19](#)

Yeah. Like, we're still there. Like my, my wedding, like anything that's important and that we reach out to, we're there. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, so that's new. That was a brand new concept to me, to me, you know, they are my family. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [09:37](#)

Yeah. It sounds like they, um, you all form really tight one. Yes. I heard that. Overall, the interviews with everyone, so I believe that <laugh> It sounds like it. And I believe it. Um, so you mentioned that you had like a culture, um, culture clash.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [09:57](#)

Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [09:58](#)

Why, why was that?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [10:00](#)

I think, you know, going to Roosevelt, I was surrounded by Hispanic kids and in, in elementary too, middle school too. Um, but I don't think I, I think I was like one of those kids. I had like one good friend, and that was it. And so growing, getting older, I had like one good friend and that one good friend who weren't really exposed to like, you know, now I love Cumbias and I love, um, you know, going to tacos and all that good stuff, <laugh>. Um, but having that one good friend, I think we were more about cheeseburgers and fries, you know, we were more about like, I don't know, blink 182 in, in, um, Green Day or whatever, you know? And so, so, um, Ash for my Iranian friend in, in, in elac, like he was all my friend, like just him, like, every time I get outta class, I would talk to him. And he, he didn't talk about any, anything else. And, you know, like his mom's real estate business and mm-hmm. <affirmative> and maybe him going to lunch with his dad on the weekends, things like that. Um, so our conversations weren't about anything really. Or we talked about school, like, you know, what class are you taking? Things like that. Um, and then, and then another had another friend named Michael. Michael was Korean. And, and so he, again, like, we didn't talk about things like that. He talked about his culture. He talked about, he used to work at the clothing store. That's how we became friends. Oh. So we talked about like movies and shows and things like that, but n nothing beyond that. And so, and when I started meeting, um, I, I, Jorge and Joanna, and there's another, I don't know if they told you, um, I don't remember her last name now. Esp.

Gloria Sosa: [11:44](#) Espinoza.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [11:45](#) Espinoza, there you mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. They were like, you know, Spanish this, and Spanish that. And, and, and just, so I think that was the clash that I was like, okay, um, what's happening here? You know, <laugh>, like, they, they, they have a lot to offer

Speaker 1: [12:03](#) Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2: [12:03](#) <affirmative> and I, and if, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think a lot of them had ties back to Mexico. Like they, they did. I didn't. So my family, um, my family's here, and that's all that we have. Just whoever's here, like, nobody traveled back. We didn't keep communication with anybody over there. Um, nothing like that. So I think that's what it was. And they, I think I still thank them to this moment for, for helping me become me, you know, like accept accepting my, my language, accepting my music, accepting mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and, and getting to know me as a Latina woman, <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [12:49](#) That's very interesting. That's very interesting. Right. So I did that the, maybe the way you were bonding with these other people was not really to the intimate level, right?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [13:01](#) Yeah. I think it was very, very superficial.

Gloria Sosa: [13:05](#) <laugh>. I mean, it sounds like it, because you couldn't, if, I feel like if you're not able to tell them your, um, your real problems, like, hey, I'm undocumented. How, where am I gonna afford to go to college? Or this kind of things. I, I guess that, that is, that is lacking that intimate feeling.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [13:24](#) Yeah. And I, I, I think for any of us to succeed, I think that played a very pivotal role.

Gloria Sosa: [13:32](#) Right? Yes. I, I totally agree with that. Yes. So, um, you were meeting with these people who were throwing ideas back and forward across the table, and, and, um, what were your impressions? Do you think they're, are were crazier? <laugh>, something <laugh>? Oh, yeah.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [13:51](#) I think I felt, you know, how I told you at the beginning of, of, of our story, of my story was that, um, that this boy who, who sort of me mesmerized me, right? Like he mm-hmm. <affirmative>, he impressed me with the way he carried himself and the way he was talking about school and the way mm-hmm.

<affirmative>, like his vocabulary. I think that's what I was feeling. I think I was, I was starting to understand that, that we're not just youth, you know, like young adults that we have, that we have power, especially in a, in a moment that, um, that I felt that, that maybe I didn't, you know, or because I didn't have social, so therefore mm-hmm. <affirmative> and the bank had just denied my money, <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [14:32](#)

Right?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [14:34](#)

So now I'm starting to see like, okay, well these people are coming from somewhere, and they have, they seem to have power, you know, they know where they're going. Like if I'm, I don't think I was strategic to think I need them to make it. I think I just felt like, okay, I, I think I need that. Whatever it is that they have, I might need that.

Gloria Sosa: [14:56](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, interesting. Do you mind, I'm sorry, go ahead.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [15:00](#)

Oh, I said it was impressive. It was impressive. Um, as I'm talking about it, I'm thinking about Fermin. So Fermin comes from a long way of like being an activist.

Gloria Sosa: [15:14](#)

Yes.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [15:15](#)

I was completely oblivious to any of it before I, I, I met them, like, I didn't know, you know, stories have power, and it's all, it sounds all cliché now, but that wasn't something I was thinking. Like, I didn't know, even that person, whoever it was that helped me at, at ELAC to get through, you know, EOP system and, and get some support through EOP, um, that didn't, it didn't click in my mind like, oh, if I say this to someone else, or if I confide, if I seek help, help is gonna come. Like, that was not something to me. It was like, oh, thank the lord that this worked, you know, let's keep going. And then, but again, it's because your mind is busy. Your mind is busy mm-hmm. <affirmative> and going to get that money and like sleeping and doing work and, you know, um, and then dealing with your family and whatever drama is happening in your family, right?

Gloria Sosa: [16:08](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah, that's true. And I totally agree with that. Yes. Thank you for sharing that. Um, so you met them in the summer of 2007.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [16:20](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yes.

Gloria Sosa: [16:21](#) And then fall comes and what happens during fall?

Elizabeth Aguil...: [16:25](#) Fall comes and now we have a room, like we have an actual room for our meetings and.

Gloria Sosa: [16:31](#) Oh okay.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [16:32](#) Yeah. To me, coming from where I was coming from, I had already, uh, formed a close bond with several of them. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, but again, to me it was still like, I'm feeding off their energy. These people are, are very happy and they're very, uh, they're very positive. Um, you know, my mom and I were constantly at odds with each other, <laugh>, and, and that had a lot to do, now that I look back on it because mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, because of that, I felt like, oh, these people are, are peaceful and, and they're driven, and I wanna be there still not really understanding what it was. But, you know, I remember some of them saying like, oh, we have a room. And there was something really to be excited about. And to have a room at Cal State LA, you know, I think to me was power, you know, because we were meeting outside of Tolchini's, and now to some, for someone to give us access to a room. Like, I thought that was just for like, teachers and professors, you know?

Gloria Sosa: [17:32](#) Right.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [17:32](#) Like adults, you know? So I think that alone speaks to power, like as a student, you have power, um, and you can drive your own life. Right? So, so I looked forward to it every time there was, uh, between classes. So there was a meeting, I look forward to it, and I wanted to be there. And, and they started talking about, you know, how like you were gonna roll out the bylaws of the organization and what to name it. And, and we just got caught up in all those things, you know, um, what our logo was gonna be like, and mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And they, they, I started feeling like part of a team, like everybody was voting and bringing up ideas and, and we were being silly. Like, I <laugh>, I don't know, it's a Phoenix, I think <laugh> for cer, Sohi a Phoenix. But I remember being like, let it be a chicken. You know, because I was being, um, cause people were silly. Like, people were like, oh, it may be a donkey. And, you know, we were just being silly. And, and I think that felt so comfortable to not, to not feel restricted. It was like our own space, our own mm-hmm. Our own jokes, you know. But it was, it was sitting to somewhere big mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, so, so I attended all those meetings and then one day I, I don't remember why I was with, uh, Jose Beltran, and we ended up

going to Tejeda's office, who was our team, the advisor of the, of the group. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And we went into his office and I sat there and, and I think it was the first time that I saw someone in, in power, right. To level with someone who, who I believe had no power, you know? But I was starting to see how how they came together to, to collaborate. It was a collaborative effort. And Tejeda was really, was very down to earth. And he like, sat with us like we were peers. And he said, I remember he said, he said that he said if we wanted to create change, you know, we needed to be the face of the movement as students mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And um, and I was like, okay, <laugh>, you know, but we're just kids. Like we're, we're in school. And he started talking about his background and I remember him talking about, um, the Chicano Movement, I think mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, him and a few others like, um, David Sandoval and other people that came into, into our, our Lives later that they had all served, you know, and they were all leading that movement. And he was like, you know, you guys as as, um, educated, law abiding citizens, you know, you need to be the face of this. Like, not me, it's you guys. And let me be, you know, your guidance. Like, use me to facilitate what you guys think is best for it, you know? And, um, and he just sympathized, he sympathized a lot. I think I always saw him like, you know, like, like dad, right. Than more than an advisor. Um, but yeah, we were there and that's, that's how I started. And then I understood like, okay, we're not alone. And, and Tejeda brought up, um, David Sandoval, who was the director of EOP at that time at Cal State LA. Um, Luz Orjon I think was also in the conversation. She must have had a different job cuz she wasn't as as involved as she became later on. But yeah, I think just knowing that we had support, I felt like Cal State LA became my home. Like, you know, my, my mini city where, where it was safe and, and I had power. I had power and I was doing something to, to become that someone. Right. That mom kept saying, become someone <laugh> now, now it's now it was now it was tangible. Like it was, it was real. And I knew who I was now. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and, and um, after fall it just, it grew and grew. We recruited, we recruited people, <laugh>, and, and by, I don't know, I think it was like the end of fall beginning we mm-hmm. <affirmative>, like we had a good solid number of people and that was empowering, you know, to, to know there's more, there's more of me. It's not just me.

Gloria Sosa:

[21:58](#)

Right. Right. Um, okay, so there was a lot there. So let me see, um, you all get the access to having your meetings in a room. Do you remember, what was your role? Were the different the, was the organization divided in different roles or the membership? Or how did that work?

Speaker 2: [22:19](#) I think at the beginning we were, we were all learning

Speaker 1: [22:23](#) Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2: [22:23](#) So it was a group effort to come up with, again, like the name to come up with the colors, you know, to come up with, um, I guess we wanted like a slogan, um, to come up with who was gonna facilitate the meeting. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we were still understanding. And it wasn't until a lot later that we realized that we needed positions. You know, the school wanted to know more about, um, I guess every club was, was, uh, re was required to have, you know, like a treasurer and have like a historian and have, so we learned about that process. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, there as a group. And Jose and Jorge might have been the ones, and Joanna, Espinoza might have been the ones talking to, um, student, I don't even know what they call anymore, ASI

Gloria Sosa: [23:17](#) <laugh>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Right. Like the something school <laugh>.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [23:21](#) Yeah. So I think they were the ones attending those meetings and learning how to run the meeting. And so with time, yeah. We started talking about like, okay, like who would like to be, you know, president, who would like to be VP and what are those roles, uh, entail, you know, like weekly meetings with Tejada and um mm-hmm. <affirmative> seeking, you know, relationships with other clubs, like brainstorming all these, all these ideas to become, to become well established, but also, but also we wanted to change things on campus. Ummm-hmm. <affirmative>, I'm gonna retract a little bit, but when I mm-hmm. <affirmative>, when I went back, when I first started at Cal State LA I remember the same experience walking into admissions office and they, they wanted to know what I needed and I had to go way back and say, you know, in 2001, you know, AB 540 was passed. And you know, these are sort of like, these are my rights, right? Like, tell me what to do to enroll or like, tell me what to do to, I don't even know what it, what it was, but I, but everywhere I went, I remember it was just insane. And, and to me it was a little demeaning because again, I was still making sense of who I was in that, in that, in the spectrum of things. And so to go to every office and say like, you know, I'm undocumented. And, and I wasn't uncomfortable with that yet. Right. I had to say it, you know, this is, I don't have a social security. This is what that means. Like, and that was the meaning. And I think everybody will agree to that. Um, and we knew we had to change that. It was like, okay. And Tejada you know, I think that was the first thing we told them. Like, you

know, it's, it's not okay. Like the university should know that we're here and that, and they should have a process in place and we shouldn't have to define mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we're not AB 540. Like I'm Elizabeth, you know, <laugh>. Right. And he's not AB 540, like, that's Jose and mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, the fact that we had to be AB 540, like that was like our name and last name, you know, um, for them to know how to serve us. And even then, they were just, at many instances they were like, well, we're gonna check in and get back to you, you know, come back at whatever time. Um, we wanted to change that. We didn't want people to feel that way. We wanted people to feel accepted, you know, welcome. And I think that was one of the first things like how do we get the word out on campus? How do we have admin, um, push these protocols in place, put 'em in place so that more people feel welcome? Because we were probably the, I think we were probably the first wave of of students to come in under, under AB 540, you know, I don't know. There might have been more, but, but it felt like it was us. Like we were there and they needed to serve us and they didn't know how. And, um, and I think that pushed us into, into creating the roles. So when we had the roles, you know, like I remember the historian, you know, Tejada had given us a little bit of how, a little bit of information of how mm-hmm. <affirmative>, a historian can collect document things that we're doing mm-hmm. <affirmative> so that we can, um, we can push things forward and, you know, liaisons like your jobs was to go and seek, um, seek support from other organizations, some other groups. Um, and they did, they did. Um, I, I was more on the quiet side. I joked around and I felt welcome, but I was more on the quiet side. I mm-hmm. <affirmative>. I had input when it was meeting time, but I didn't, I didn't feel ready to take on this role. And I think it's always, it always has been because, um, because it's too personal. You know, even right now meeting with you, I, I saw it as a challenge. Um, this friend passed away.

Gloria Sosa: [27:20](#)

Hmm. I'm so sorry about that.

Elizabeth Aguil...: [27:22](#)

Yeah. So I was like, I need to go talk now. <laugh>. Like, this is, this is what I can do now.

Gloria Sosa: [27:33](#)

I'm so sorry about that. I'm sorry. Um, and thank you, thank you for, for sharing your memories with me, with the project, with, um, other folks because you're not the only one. Right. We are not the only ones who are going through this. And, and the same things that are happening to you that had happened to you are happening to other folks. So I think it's very important for us to share our story and let it know that, like how you felt

once you're not alone and they're more than you. And it takes a lot of courage, a lot of courage to find resources to, um, disclose who you are, essentially. Right. Because as you figured out who you are, you're also trying to disclose it to other folks so that they could help you with that. Right? Yeah. But thank you so much for, um, sharing that. And if you feel comfortable, we can stop for today.

Elizabeth Aguil...:

[28:27](#)

Yeah.