

Gloria Sosa: [00:03](#) Okay, Rocio. So thank you for, uh, agreeing to talk to me. Uh, so we'll get started with the questions. Can you please share with me your age, you prefer gender pronouns and, uh, during what years were you at Cal State LA.

Rocio Ortiz: [00:19](#) My name is Rocio Ortiz. Uh, my gender pronouns that I prefer to go by, um, are she, her, ella And the years I was at Cal State LA was from 2000 thousand 12, uh, fall 2012, uh, to 2017, which I believe would be spring 2017.

Gloria Sosa: [00:50](#) Were you a student or, um, an undergrad student?

Rocio Ortiz: [00:55](#) Yes, I was an undergrad student.

Gloria Sosa: [00:57](#) Did you come, um, as a transfer student from community college or were you uh, from high school?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:03](#) I came directly from high school.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05](#) From high school. Okay. Where did you go to high school?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:11](#) I went to, I was at, I was at Garfield for two years, and then I was at, I went transferred to Torres for two the last two years to then go to Cal State LA.

Gloria Sosa: [01:22](#) Okay. May I ask, why did you transfer from Garfield to, um, the other school?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:29](#) Uh, my drama teacher at the moment, um, she, she told me to join her in her new high, high school. She was gonna be one of the principals in Torres since they had different academies. So she invited me to join her and I joined her. And during that time I was very into art and I was willing to pursue or go to like, one of the best schools to pursue that.

Gloria Sosa: [01:56](#) Oh, nice. Uh, was it like the theater

Rocio Ortiz: [02:00](#) That you were Yeah, she was a, yeah, she was a drama teacher and I wanted to pursue theater at the time.

Gloria Sosa: [02:05](#) Oh, that's so nice. Okay. So, um, in 2012 when you came to Cal State LA were you a theater major?

Rocio Ortiz: [02:15](#) Yes, I went into Cal State LA as a theater major.

Gloria Sosa: [02:21](#) Okay, nice. Okay, so now let me backtrack a little. That was interesting. <laugh>, when people switch to schools, um, were,

um, can you share with me your family background? Like, where were you born? Um, where's your family from?

- Rocio Ortiz: [02:36](#) Uh, yes. So I was born in Puebla, Mexico. Um, my, my family, my mom, my, my dad are both from Puebla, Mexico.
- Gloria Sosa: [02:51](#) Um, do you remember how old were you when you migrated from Puebla?
- Rocio Ortiz: [02:57](#) Yes, I was six years old.
- Gloria Sosa: [03:02](#) Okay. So you, you were a little a child, but, um, um, were you, do you have any memories of the, um, journey coming here?
- Rocio Ortiz: [03:11](#) Yes. I, I have snippets or I, I remember like 80% of it.
- Gloria Sosa: [03:19](#) Do you mind sharing A little bit? I mean, again, you don't have to, you don't want to.
- Rocio Ortiz: [03:23](#) Yeah, of course. Um, uh, so I just remember we left, en la noche, I think it was like 12 or 1:00 PM I have to ask my mom specifically what time, but I just remember it was at night. And, um, she just asked us to get up and we got into this truck, from the truck. I remember going into a plane from the plane, I remember because I had a, once I got off the plane, I had this like, pain in my ear since it was my first time being on an, in an airplane. I remember I was crying from there. We got transferred to, uh, I believe my, I just remember, uh, being with my, uh, going to my uncle, my uncle and his wife. And then I remember that they took us showers. I remember I was wearing my dress the last, uh, dress I wore when I graduated from preschool or, or elementary, I believe.
- Rocio Ortiz: [04:41](#) And they got rid of our dresses and they threw everything and they changed, they, uh, changed us into American clothes, like sneakers, jeans, and I believe like a shirt, sweater. Um, I also remember like the lady having long nails and really hurting our heads because, I don't know, she was doing it too rough and she wasn't being kind. And I just remember it being a long, like, a long journey on a, on a car, eh, to me it seemed like, like a desert, but I wasn't, I'm not sure if that was, if that that's what we were going through. And then I just remember waking up 'cause we fell asleep at some point. Uh, waking up with my, um, at my Tia's house, which is my, my uncle's, uh, sister, which is my mom's family side,

Gloria Sosa: [05:51](#) That through the, through the travel, um, traveling in the car, were you alone or with your parents

Rocio Ortiz: [05:58](#) Through the car? Um, I was with my sister. It was just me and my sister.

Gloria Sosa: [06:06](#) Okay. Um, how many siblings do you have?

Rocio Ortiz: [06:10](#) I have, uh, well, at the time it was two girls and two boys. So in total were four, uh, siblings are three. Uh, now it's three boys and two girls.

Gloria Sosa: [06:24](#) Okay. So there was one more born here?

Rocio Ortiz: [06:27](#) Yeah. Mm-Hmm? <affirmative> the smallest one.

Gloria Sosa: [06:29](#) Oh, nice. So younger brother. Um, and are you the oldest sibling?

Rocio Ortiz: [06:37](#) I'm not. I'm the second to the oldest.

Gloria Sosa: [06:39](#) Okay. Second to, so did every, all the, um, the whole family migrated, um, with you at the same time?

Rocio Ortiz: [06:49](#) Uh, uh, no. My dad came first and then we came with my mom. My mom decided to bring us all, which was my sister, myself and my two younger brothers.

Gloria Sosa: [07:05](#) Okay. Um, when you came with your family, with your mom and your siblings, how long had it has had it, has it been since you last saw your father? Do you remember?

Rocio Ortiz: [07:19](#) Um, when we migrated to the US or,

Gloria Sosa: [07:23](#) Yeah. So, um, you say your father came first, right? Yes. Do you remember how many years before you all joined him?

Rocio Ortiz: [07:32](#) Okay. Yeah. Um, uh, just based, I don't remember, but I, I've asked my mom. Um, she said it was like about a year.

Gloria Sosa: [07:40](#) Okay. So like about a year? Mm-Hmm.

Rocio Ortiz: [07:43](#) <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [07:44](#) I mean, you were pretty young, so maybe

Rocio Ortiz: [07:46](#) You don't remember. Yeah, I don't remember. I had to ask my mom.

Gloria Sosa: [07:50](#) No, it's fine. I mean, I'm just trying to get a sense of, you know, where you come from. Um, okay. So thank you for sharing that. Um, so let me, let me ask a, let me backtrack a little of your family history. So when you came to the US, were, did, do you remember in what area did you live?

Rocio Ortiz: [08:13](#) When I came to the US? Yes. Um, in LA we, we, yeah, we've been living here. Um, not, not in this specific house, but here in East LA we've. Lo que va siendo la es tambien como la frontera de boyle heights y East LA Lived it. We, oh, no, we've started in East LA and then we've just been switching houses here in the same area. Okay. Nice,

Gloria Sosa: [08:45](#) Nice. Um, so when you came here, you lived in East LA in, uh, let me see, were you placed in elementary school or middle school?

Rocio Ortiz: [08:58](#) Uh, I was placed in elementary.

Gloria Sosa: [09:02](#) Elementary, right.

Rocio Ortiz: [09:04](#) Yeah. And I got, I got pulled back one year. They, they thought that it was better for me to start, get pulled back, so I would learn the language better.

Gloria Sosa: [09:19](#) And do you think that was the case? Did it help you learn faster or more?

Rocio Ortiz: [09:26](#) Honestly, learning English has been very traumatic. It, it, I think it's very hard for someone who's coming in and it's expected to learn English when their primary language is Spanish. Um, mm, I, I don't know. That's, those are my feelings that those have always been my feelings with just, you know, being, being pulled out of your birthplace and then be put into a different country that you have no, no idea about. And like, be forced to learn another language. Uh, I think more so because you feel like, I hate using this word, but you feel alienated, like you're by yourself. I, I always felt by myself. I always felt like no one understood me. And now that as I'm, as I'm, as I'm older and I realize the public system, the schooling system is not the best. I don't think getting pulled back or I, I still think that didn't help.

Gloria Sosa: [10:45](#) Yes, definitely. I think that I had a really hard time, um, learning English and as you know, have a hard time <laugh>. But, um, uh,

did it have any resources for you to learn English? Like a teacher aid or like a special class for you to, um, learn English

- Rocio Ortiz: [11:05](#) For? Um, in elementary? Like in elementary? No, no. You were just put in the group and next you were expected to learn English.
- Gloria Sosa: [11:14](#) Figure it out.
- Rocio Ortiz: [11:15](#) Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [11:17](#) And where about middle school was the experience? Um, well, how many years were you in elementary school?
- Rocio Ortiz: [11:26](#) Um, it's, it's like when, when a child here gets put in elementary, so like, I guess it's five, six years, the whole entire
- Gloria Sosa: [11:36](#) Oh, the whole thing. So I think it's six, the whole
- Rocio Ortiz: [11:39](#) Thing.
- Gloria Sosa: [11:39](#) Is it six or five? I don't know.
- Rocio Ortiz: [11:42](#) I think it's one through five and then, yeah, I think it's elementary. Six. Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [11:47](#) Okay. Like when I came, I was older and I went to to middle school, so that's why, I don't know, <laugh>,
- Rocio Ortiz: [11:53](#) Oh, in middle school, um, they had ESL classes, but even taking those classes made me feel stupid.
- Gloria Sosa: [12:03](#) Why?
- Rocio Ortiz: [12:04](#) You know, uh, I always felt like, like I was never good enough with my English because I was put into these classes that, that, um, like made me feel that way. I didn't feel like that in the class because everyone else that was in there was learning what I was learning. But when you like talked to your friends and they were taking regular English class or AP English and you were in ESL, you felt different.
- Gloria Sosa: [12:39](#) Oh, okay. And do you remember like the other students at the ESL class were, they're also from, um, I don't know, how did they look? They were your age? Were they, uh, older, younger?

Rocio Ortiz: [12:55](#) Uh, uh, it was a mixed, uh, and I just remember this girl that was older than me. I think she was, uh, at the time, I think she was in eighth grade. Uh, and she was in ESL Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So, yeah, mixed. I don't think it's very few folks that were the same age as me.

Gloria Sosa: [13:19](#) And were they all like, um, ESL class was, uh, um, like a mixed level or did they have like one, two, or three, you know how they have levels?

Rocio Ortiz: [13:30](#) Um, I think it was like one, two, and three. I don't remember the specific ESL class, but it seemed like we were all learning the same thing.

Gloria Sosa: [13:45](#) Okay. Um, okay. So that, um, but the, at, at this point, did you feel a little more comfortable with English?

Rocio Ortiz: [13:54](#) Uh, yes. Yes. Uh, I, I think I, I stopped being a little less ashamed in middle school.

Gloria Sosa: [14:05](#) Nice. And, and moving a little forward to high school. Um, do you still, were you still enrolled in ESL classes?

Rocio Ortiz: [14:13](#) I was not. I was taking regular English classes.

Gloria Sosa: [14:18](#) Okay. And how did that change your experience from being an ESL student? Now being a, a regular English student,

Rocio Ortiz: [14:30](#) I guess it got rid of the feeling of feeling not enough and feeling like a regular student with other students that were also learning, uh, the material that was being taught in that class.

Gloria Sosa: [14:52](#) Nice. And, um, and, and you switched schools right? In high school? So, um,

Rocio Ortiz: [14:59](#) Yes. I was at Garfield for two years and then Torres.

Gloria Sosa: [15:03](#) Torres for the last two to pursue theater. Um, and how did, which one did you enjoy more? One guessing the one with the theater, right?

Rocio Ortiz: [15:12](#) Uh, just schools wise, are you referring to schools?

Gloria Sosa: [15:17](#) Yeah. Or your, your experience in general?

Rocio Ortiz: [15:21](#) Uh, yeah. Yeah. Um, I felt like it was, uh, small. It was, it was smaller, so you got to know everyone. Everyone was very

supportive. Everyone in the school knew that I was undocumented and that I wanted to go to school. And we, it came to a point where the teachers started paying stuff for me because they really wanted me to, to worry, not worry about certain things. They were, um, yeah, they were a, a very supportive community that I'm very grateful for because I don't think where I would've been if it wasn't for them. Right. Um, there's a teacher who paid a, paid me under the tables just so I could have money in my pocket.

- Gloria Sosa: [16:08](#) Mm-Hmm. Or like, work in the classroom or like outside of class,
- Rocio Ortiz: [16:14](#) Uh, work, like teach one of her classes and she would pay me.
- Gloria Sosa: [16:18](#) Oh, nice. That's nice. Yeah. Um, so how did they find out about your, um, undocumented status?
- Rocio Ortiz: [16:27](#) Um, it was through theater writing. Some pieces that I wrote, I was, oh, I'm still into poetry. Um, so when I would like do monologues or write poetry, uh, that's that I would talk about that a lot. It was my way of expressing myself. And so I would just put myself out there and they, they understood that I was coming from that.
- Gloria Sosa: [16:56](#) Oh, okay. Did you remember the first time that you, um, maybe read a poet, a poem where you disclose your status or the first time that you publicly disclosed your status to, to the others?
- Rocio Ortiz: [17:15](#) I, I think so. I think I just remember reading it. I was just scared. Um, but I eventually did it and I, I was crying, but everyone was very supportive.
- Gloria Sosa: [17:31](#) Um, what were you crying? Oh, I mean, what what feelings were you, were you experiencing at the time?
- Rocio Ortiz: [17:39](#) Um, uh, just fear, like, fear of what others would think and or what they would say. Um, 'cause it's, it's not an easy thing to, to do, to put yourself in, to put yourself out there in public like that.
- Gloria Sosa: [18:03](#) Right. But, um, um, I mean, I'm guessing you, you already felt, um, like welcome in the space for you to do something so brave.
- Rocio Ortiz: [18:16](#) Yeah, yeah. Um, I think the, the school was, you know, it's focused on art. So, um, I think I felt com comfort with art because, um, a lot the community art, art community is very

empath empathetic and, and welcoming and compassionate. So I, I always felt safe, uh, from the beginning. And when I did decide to, I guess, come out of the shadows, uh, in front of the teachers and, and the students and the community there.

- Gloria Sosa: [18:57](#) Yes. And this was roughly in one year, maybe 2010?
- Rocio Ortiz: [19:05](#) Uh, yes. 2010.
- Gloria Sosa: [19:07](#) Right. Yeah. Okay. So during, around this time, there's a lot of, um, undocumented youth activism, like everywhere, right? There are publicly, um, speaking, coming out of the shadows, uh, having all these demonstrations. Um, did you participate in any of that, um, maybe in or outside your school?
- Rocio Ortiz: [19:34](#) Um, I, I didn't outside 'cause I wasn't aware of any, like, groups where I can go to in school. Um, um, they didn't have a club that I can, that focused on that and that I could join A lot of it was just very artistic, um, in the sense of like the, the Latin Dance Club that I was part of or the, the leadership group that I was part of. But they didn't have like a specific undocumented student support group on campus.
- Gloria Sosa: [20:21](#) But you were, um, familiar and aware that these act activities were happening?
- Rocio Ortiz: [20:28](#) Uh, yes. Uh, I was slightly aware. I think I became more aware when it was my senior year, uh, um, where I, I had to really, um, had to reach out to folks that were, uh, doing the work and there were activists that were knowledgeable that help, that eventually helped me to help me and provided resources for me to, uh, um, to learn about the college system.
- Gloria Sosa: [21:06](#) Right. And, um, how did you become aware, or how did you realize that you needed to, um, find like, additional help outside your school to go to, um, college?
- Rocio Ortiz: [21:21](#) A lot of the, uh, a lot of it came from my college advisor. Um, I remember him telling me, or asking me if I was gonna go to college and it's, it, it was a question that I, I hadn't, maybe I had in mind subconsciously, but not consciously. I just know that the time was coming that we were gonna gonna graduate and I had to figure out my next step. Um, because it was also a conversation I had to have with my parents, if, if I, if they were gonna support me in any way or just to let them know. Um, and he, he asked me and I told him that I wanted to go, or he specifically specifically asked me where I wanted to go. And I

told him, I, I don't know. I just know I just wanna go to college. Do you have any recommendations?

- Rocio Ortiz: [22:19](#) And then he gave me, he literally picked up, picked all the colleges for me. <laugh>. I was like, this is just, this is what I just wanna do you, what recommendations do you give me? 'cause I had no idea. And, uh, from there, I think I would, you know, as I started applying, I would ask more questions and then he's all like, okay, I, I can't help you with those specific questions. Uh, being an undocumented student. So he led me to, I believe it was him. He gave me an email of an activist that had those resources. And that's how I came across, uh, in contact with one of them. And I just remember talking to him through email and he was very helpful and, and through email, he just seemed like he, he just told me like, if you need anything, I'm here for you. But I've never met the person in person. I knew who he was, but, uh, I'm grateful that he was just willing, he was just so open about helping me or about any questioning that I had. Mm-Hmm.
- Gloria Sosa: [23:23](#) Do you remember the person's name or their
- Rocio Ortiz: [23:26](#) Location? Yes, his name was Eric and I think he went by, it was really cool. I forgot <laugh>. I was like, I tell you that I have a good memory. Um, I just know he, I think he called super Eric or something on social media. And I think I eventually made him a friend. I made him my friend on Facebook, but then he disappeared. He was very involved, but I just remember his first name was Eric.
- Gloria Sosa: [23:56](#) And so did Eric connected you to other people, or, um, how did he help your journey to, uh, apply for college?
- Rocio Ortiz: [24:05](#) I think he just provided like, uh, certain resources. Resources, um, like the Dream Act. He was, I think he had so much, he had some information about the Dream Act. Uh, it was something that was, people were saying it was gonna happen and, and he, I think he brought it up to my attention. Uh, and, and scholarships specifically, like a list of scholarships for undocumented students. Um, and, and that was it. Like, I think just, uh, he just provided me information with that. Mm-Hmm.
- Gloria Sosa: [24:45](#) <affirmative>. Nice. So, um, I mean, what are some of the, um, challenges that you faced or have faced growing up because of your undocumented status? Um, I mean, it sounds like applying to colleges was a little limited because of your status, right. But I mean, what else has, um, been a challenge because of your status?

- Rocio Ortiz: [25:11](#) Yes. Uh, once I started, um, getting closer to, um, graduating and, uh, the question was being asked of, are you gonna go to college? If you go to college? Which college? Um, and I remember my college counselor asking or telling me like, you need to have this conversation with your parents. And I said, okay. He's like, you have really good grades, you deserve to go to college. And so I, I just remember, uh, talking to my, I guess the only person I like would just remember talking to my mom and telling her, I didn't even ask her. I just told her, mom, I wanna go to college. And I just remember her telling me, no, she told me, you are not gonna go. And I said, why are you not, why are you like, I worked so hard for these grades and you don't want me to go to college?
- Rocio Ortiz: [26:15](#) And I just remember she was crying and she's all like, it's 'cause I don't have the money to support you. I don't have money and I can't be giving you, like, I know you're gonna, if you go like, I, my, I'm never gonna be able to help you because I'm, we're barely surviving with the, um, with the rent, with the bills that we have on our end. I don't want you to, um, what's the word? I don't want you to like get all caught up in this idea of college when it's not realistic for, at least for me. Um, that was the first challenge. I came across <laugh>. And, um, I just remember telling her, putting my foot down and telling her, I understand you. You are saying you're not letting me go to college, but I'm gonna go. I don't know how I'm gonna come up with the money.
- Rocio Ortiz: [27:20](#) Um, but le dije I told her I'm, I don't know, I'm gonna steal bank or something. <laugh>, I'm going to college. And, um, she didn't say no again. She just hugged me and I told her, I'm gonna figure it out. I don't care. I just really want to go to college. I really, this is the dream. This is the dream. You know, this is what you brought us here for. I cannot come here and not be someone. And, um, yeah, we just hugged. But she was my first obstacle. Um, from there, um, I, I had the understanding that my second obstacle was going to be money. Um, at the time the Dream Act was still up in the air. It was, uh, I think it was, it had just, it was going to be passed or it had just passed. And like always like when something new comes, comes out for the, for our community, people are are like trying to figure it out how it works.
- Rocio Ortiz: [28:28](#) Um, so I wasn't relying on the Dream Act me puse a pensar me puse las pilas and I said, you know what? I'm gonna need money for college. So I started selling chips at school, uh, and I was making money. I started saving. And then the word got across. 'cause you are not supposed to sell chips at school, it's against, uh, the law in, in the school system. And so I remember the

word got to my principal and she is like, Hey, I heard you're selling chips. I was like, yeah, le dije, but I'm not doing it because I, I just want the money. I want the money to go to college. She's like, okay, do it, but don't let the other principal see you. Um, so everyone was like on my side. They were cheering me on. They were supporting me. I'm telling you, like there was other teachers that heard that I wanna go to college.

Rocio Ortiz: [29:27](#)

And that was my last year. Hired me to teach the class and paid me under the table. Another teacher paid for my senior packet so I didn't have to worry about it or my parents had, so they didn't have to worry about it. Um, I managed to save some money and by the time that I, by the time that I graduated, I think I, I ended up having maybe 2000, \$3,000. 'cause let me tell you, high school students will buy chips, <laugh>, they're obsessed with chips. Um, and that was, I, you know, that was the business at that time. It still is, I believe. Um, and yeah, I had my savings once I got out of, I got out of college. I graduated as a valedictorian of my high school.

Rocio Ortiz: [30:22](#)

Um, I got into Berkeley, I think, I believe I got into Riverside. Um, and then I got into Cal State LA but I had to be realistic. Um, Berkeley did call me to go to their school and they begged me to go to their school, but I was up in the air. They're like, oh, it's 'cause the dream act is gonna come out and they're gonna help you. I was like, yeah, but what about everything else? What about housing? What about, uh, food? What about transportation? What about my books? What about all of that? I don't, I'm not ready. You guys, you guys charge a lot. It's a, it's a private school <inaudible>. And for me to leave, leave my family and, and do it all by myself, I can't. Um, so I had the conversation. I let go of Berkeley, but Berkeley, I guess I can probably say that I got in, accepted into Berkeley.

Rocio Ortiz: [31:20](#)

Um, I, I came down it, it just came down to Cal State La I didn't wanna be far from home and I had just had to be realistic about that. I had just told my mom that I was gonna go to school and that I was gonna figure it out. So if I was gonna figure out somewhere in this, you know, state, it was gonna be at home. Um, and uh, I, soon after I just started working, I started working right here next to my house, which is el Mercadito. My uncle talked to the owner 'cause they're friends and I started working there. And when school started, I started, I started, uh, soon after I started, uh, I started attending Cal State LA.

Gloria Sosa: [32:19](#)

Nice. It sounds like your mom telling, you know, we cannot afford kinda, um, fire up the desire right. To to to hustle

<laugh>, yeah. And pay for college. Yes. I mean, \$3,000, sounds like a lot.

Rocio Ortiz: [32:38](#) Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it's like a one semester, I believe. Well back then it was quarters. It's a one semester to cover one semester. But it's, it was enough to start me, to get me started and then work and save up again.

Gloria Sosa: [32:53](#) Right. Okay. So let me stop here.