

Gloria Sosa : [00:02](#) Okay. So we were talking about the, um, the hassle <laugh> that entrepreneurship that you took during high school to, um, save money. So besides, besides you selling chips and working, um, with some of your teachers, did you have any other resources to prepare you of, to get you ready for college?

Rocio Ortiz: [00:31](#) Um, uh, in Garfield we had gear up. Um, they would take us to field trips to colleges. Um, I remember they took us to, they took us to San Francisco to actually meet the campuses there. I believe we went to Berkeley. Um, but it was all the, the colleges in, in the Bay Area, uh, well, some of them. Um, so I had them and then one of their college counselors came to Torres and he was guiding, he was the main person that was guiding me. Um, but that's, that was it.

Gloria Sosa : [01:18](#) But in terms like, uh, um, resources specifically for undocumented students, there were any available?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:26](#) No. No. Um, I remember there was a lot of undocumented friends that I had in that school, in different ca in different academies that had the same questions that I had. So we are just trying to figure it out together.

Gloria Sosa : [01:42](#) Okay. So at this point, did y'all form like a support group, like an informal support group or something along those lines?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:50](#) No.

Gloria Sosa : [01:52](#) No. So it was just, uh, getting together and trying to figure it out, out, the questions that you all had?

Rocio Ortiz: [01:58](#) Um, uh, not really. I think because we were all going to different campuses, I just remember this specific friend that was also, uh, undocumented and he was going to Pomona that he had some questions on how to do I think FAFSA or the Dream Act or certain, I think, or even AB five 40, um, that I could not give him any like, responses to. 'cause Cal State LA was asking for something else, I believe, um, or nothing compared to what they were asking him because each campus was different from my, my understanding. But, um, it was never like we got together to, um, to form a group or to like help each other. I think we were in the mindset of we're just trying to figure it out on our own.

Gloria Sosa : [02:58](#) Do you have any, any, um, ideas now that you think about it? Why was that?

Rocio Ortiz: [03:06](#) Why we were just like in a like

Gloria Sosa : [03:09](#) Kind of, kind of more independent?

Rocio Ortiz: [03:14](#) Um, I think because we were, both of us were first generation, so like we never had anyone to help us, guide us look up to and first generation's, first ones going to college. So we were really just trying to figure it out. I didn't have any answers for him. I was not experienced, I didn't have the right resources and we weren't aware of any groups or folks that could help us or that could be there. Uh, or even our college counselors didn't quite understand what we had to fill out or had to fill it out because we, it seemed that they hadn't had that much experience working. Where? With undocumented students? Or it wasn't a common thing for, I'm not sure. Um, like it was a common like, population that they would work with.

Gloria Sosa : [04:20](#) Right. Maybe it didn't, um, didn't come across many undocumented students who really serious about pursuing college. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. It might be one of those. Okay. Thank you for sharing that. Um, so besides, let see, so who helped you apply for the schools that you were applying to? Because you applied to certain ucs in certain cal states, right?

Rocio Ortiz: [04:47](#) Yes.

Gloria Sosa : [04:49](#) And at this time, and if I'm not wrong, you need to pay for the fees, right? For the applications?

Rocio Ortiz: [04:56](#) Yes. Uh, are you referring to like, who helped me as far as fill, filling them out or who helped me pay for them?

Gloria Sosa : [05:05](#) Both. How did you pay and who will help you? Um, because there's certain questions that only ask get asked, right. And we need to bypass the social security number stuff and all that stuff.

Rocio Ortiz: [05:16](#) Yeah. So with the applications, the forms, electronic forms, uh, my college counselor helped me, uh, um, and then with the, the payment, I had saved up some money and I was willing to pay, but I, not sure who spread the word. And I got some scholarships from, one was from like a tax guy. I'm not sure. I think one of my college counselor actually paid for one because they didn't want me to pay. Um, a lot of people came through. I, I like to call like angels because I was ready to pay, but they, they told me, you don't have to 'cause someone gave me a

scholarship or or funds to cover you for those applications. Uh, for, yeah. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

- Gloria Sosa : [06:13](#) Oh, that was really nice that, you know, they helped you out there. Um, did you remember what other schools you got into? You got, I got into at Berkeley, Riverside and obviously Cost LA Do you remember the other schools?
- Rocio Ortiz: [06:32](#) Uh, Cal Poly Pomona?
- Rocio Ortiz: [06:35](#) Yeah. I remember we went to visit Cal Poly Pomona. I went with my parents. They're asking all these documents, um, because I didn't wanna go to Cal State LA 'cause they compared to ELAC <laugh>, they compared it to ELAC. I think. I am not sure if they still do it, but, um, I guess, I don't know. I, I was just thinking about like getting away from home, but not too far. So I remember going to Cal Poly Pomona and just asking about money and we thought it was too much and then it was too far. So Cal it came down to Cal State LA.
- Gloria Sosa : [07:13](#) So you picked Cal State LA based on location For the most part?
- Rocio Ortiz: [07:20](#) Yes. Yes. 'cause it was close to home. I could easily commute. I could have a, a home to come back to and a place where I can eat.
- Gloria Sosa : [07:33](#) Right. So it was more convenient, right?
- Rocio Ortiz: [07:37](#) Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. Because if not, then I would have to think about housing or renting, let's say if I went to Pomona renting there.
- Gloria Sosa : [07:49](#) Right.
- Rocio Ortiz: [07:50](#) Extra, extra things.
- Gloria Sosa : [07:55](#) So, um, you graduated from high school in 2012?
- Rocio Ortiz: [07:59](#) Yeah. Yes.
- Gloria Sosa : [08:00](#) So at this time, um, the Dream Act passed in October, 2011, but it was not implemented 2012. So, uh, the first year that you went to Cal State LA were you, uh, awarded the Dream Act?
- Rocio Ortiz: [08:16](#) Uh, I think, uh, the financial aid at Cal State LA was still trying to figure it out. Since you mentioned it was being implemented in 2012. They didn't implement it. They were able to figure things

out until 2013. And that's when I was, I believe I was awarded then. Um, because I remember I had to cover my full year, and that's the money that came in from the chips to cover the first year and then to work well the first quarter. And then I had to pay the other quarter. So that's why I think it came in handy that I was working, um, because I was paying, and I don't know, I think my mom paints it very well and she gets really sad <laugh> about how she would just see me like, collect all this money and, and save all this money. And like in, in a few months, say like it would just be gone and then to start again and save up, and then it would just be gone.

- Rocio Ortiz: [09:11](#) And we saw that for like, the first, first year, uh, until the Dream Act kicked in. But even when I got the Dream Act or I was awarded the Dream Act, I didn't get the full amount. I would still have to pay, uh, I forgot how much, maybe like 800 around that, around there. Um, but I was just like, okay, this is better than having to pay the full amount in my head. And I'm like, everything else that I'll just keep saving, I'll keep doing the same routine because in my head, I, I had to make, I, I had an understanding that money was a weakness, uh, in the sense that I didn't have it, that I had to make that my strength. Uh, so my mindset was just on like, have to save, save, save for any emergency. And because I was granted that Dream Act, it doesn't mean that I don't have to save, uh, I have to save for books. I have to save for any emergency, for anything. Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa : [10:08](#) Right. So, uh, so the first year you kept, you kept working in el Mercadito and then even after work, um, I mean after getting the, um, the Dream Act?
- Rocio Ortiz: [10:20](#) Yes. Yes. I was, I was, I started working there when I started college and I continued working there for about two, the, the first two years in college, I believe if, if I remember correctly, until I got hired for as a peer mentor advisor for the Dream Resource Center.
- Gloria Sosa : [10:47](#) Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Okay. We'll get to that in a bit. So, um,
- Rocio Ortiz: [10:53](#) That, that thighs in, uh, DACA?
- Gloria Sosa : [10:55](#) Yes. Yes. That, that, that kicks in with daca. Yeah. Uh, it's implemented, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so, um, maybe thinking about, um, before DACA, um, what, um, what were some of the obstacles that you overcame growing up? I mean, this is obviously when you get here as you transition to middle, to elementary, to middle school to high school, can you

recall any obstacles about, you know, education wise, family dynamics, or any obstacles?

Rocio Ortiz: [11:34](#) Um, um, I don't have any other ones besides the ones that I mentioned. Those were some of the hardest obstacles I had to overcome.

Gloria Sosa : [11:48](#) Nice. Okay. Um, so you are the second to oldest. Oldest did, your older sister did not pursue college,

Rocio Ortiz: [11:58](#) Correct? She didn't go to college.

Gloria Sosa : [12:04](#) So you're the the first one to, um, go through the whole thing then,

Rocio Ortiz: [12:09](#) Correct? Yes.

Gloria Sosa : [12:12](#) That's, that's a, um, a role model, right? For the youngest ones?

Rocio Ortiz: [12:17](#) Yeah. It's paving, what is it called? Paving the way.

Gloria Sosa : [12:21](#) Yes. Um,

Rocio Ortiz: [12:22](#) That's hard <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa : [12:25](#) It is because you need to figure it out on your own.

Rocio Ortiz: [12:28](#) Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, no one to guide, you know, when to support you. In my case, my mom was like, no. So I had to figure it all out on my own and then the next generation was able to benefit from it, which is something to be proud of.

Gloria Sosa : [12:45](#) I think so. I think so because that's, that's, um, so, uh, right now it kind of happens the same way because some of us have DACA, right? Some don't have DACA, but we do have the Dream Act, but then, um, you know, have a work permit. People kinda get discouraged to go to college. It's like the vicious cycle of never ending. Like is it ever gonna end?

Rocio Ortiz: [13:08](#) No. They're always just trying to attack us. And people are always fearful and it makes sense. It's valid and, but uh, it's just not, it seems like it's, yeah. They, they don't want us to be happy.

Gloria Sosa : [13:25](#) Right. To have a fair shot, I think.

Rocio Ortiz: [13:28](#) Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>,

Gloria Sosa : [13:28](#) I agree with that. Yeah. Well, thank you for sharing that. Um, so, okay, so you, it comes of 2012, you're working and going to school. So, um, what, what was it like your first year working managing your work schedule and then, um, your school? How did that work?

Rocio Ortiz: [13:53](#) Um, it was, I, if I remember correctly, it went well, um, because I worked during, I worked, I went to school on the weekdays and I worked on the weekends. Um, so I would work, was it Friday, Saturday and Sunday, or Saturday and Sunday. So I would, it was easy for me to like, just alternate it. They were long hours on Saturday and Sunday. 'cause they were full-time, like a work schedule. But it was, I think it was, uh, hours that I needed to, uh, to do, to, uh, save up and be able to pay for my, my education. Right.

Gloria Sosa : [14:49](#) So, and, and, and during the first year, um, in at Cal State LA. Did you meet any, uh, anyone there, any undocumented students?

Rocio Ortiz: [15:07](#) Um, it, it all seems like a blur. <laugh>. I was like, I forgot. I'm kidding. I, I don't, um, I, I don't remember exactly the first year, but I do remember sooner than later I came across a friend, a friend that wasn't a very close friend, um, that I, I saw at Garfield and came across her and just started talking to her. And I told her that I was undocumented and she said that she was undocumented too. And, uh, she, I think it was, she introduced me to Frank Cornelio, uh, who was an AB 540 advisor. Uh, and Frank took us to, introduced us to SURGE and, and that's how we became involved. But I don't, I don't know if it was specifically the first year, I would have to like really check photos and <laugh> and maybe some of the years and really think back. 'cause I don't remember if it was the first year, but I know it was sooner than later.

Gloria Sosa : [16:34](#) Okay. Do you remember who did you meet at SURGE? Like the first time or the people who you remember who you remember from SURGE?

Rocio Ortiz: [16:45](#) The first meeting?

Gloria Sosa : [16:47](#) Uh, yeah, the first meeting.

Rocio Ortiz: [16:50](#) Uh, yeah, we, Frank took us, we sat there. Uh, we came, we met, um, uh, Miguel, Miguel, Joanna, uh, uh, um, 'cause there were so many Yoanas. There's a, a Yoana, um, she was a, I think at the time she was the vice president of SURGE and the

president, I think. Okay. I don't remember the president. Um, uh, what's his name? Este. Uh, Luis. Luis. Uh, forgot his last name. And Steve. 'cause they were all like a clique. Um, I think I met Yoana at that time too. The other Yoana, uh, Hinojosa. Uh, who else did I meet? I think that's, that's, those are like the folks that I remember that I met the first meeting.

- Gloria Sosa : [18:17](#) And what was your first impression, um, when you met them, when you came to the first meeting?
- Rocio Ortiz: [18:24](#) Uh, my first impression was that they were very friendly, very welcoming. Um, it made me feel like I wanted to be part of the group. Very high energy. Uh, I felt like family. I felt like I belonged there.
- Gloria Sosa : [18:42](#) And before, uh, meeting them, did you ever feel, um, as welcome in, in like maybe high school or even at Cals State LA, the ages before meeting them? Did you feel as welcome before?
- Rocio Ortiz: [18:56](#) Uh, no. I just felt neutral. I felt like I am entering college and, and that's it. <laugh> nothing like, hi, welcome, blah, blah, blah, <laugh>, you know, we're welcoming you with open arms. It didn't feel like that.
- Gloria Sosa : [19:14](#) And what make you feel more welcome when you met them?
- Rocio Ortiz: [19:22](#) Um, just knowing that it was, I remember when Frank told us it was the specific undocumented student support group that everyone in that room was, uh, either undocumented or an undocu ally. I felt safe and I felt seen. I felt heard. Um, I felt welcomed.
- Gloria Sosa : [19:51](#) Did you remember any of the activities that were happening that day?
- Rocio Ortiz: [19:58](#) They would always do these icebreakers that I really enjoyed. Um, like, what's something embarrassing as has happened to you and people would share. And it was really funny. We would always laugh at the icebreaker and our people's stories. And, uh, that really, for me, that really did it because it, it helped, uh, helped me see another side of like, everyone's, uh, personality and how they were. And just off the back seemed like they were fun people to be around.
- Gloria Sosa : [20:40](#) And how did that first meeting look like? I mean, were there a lot of students? Were there more allies? Were there any staff? I

mean, I guess it's hard to tell. Maybe they just look older. I don't know. <laugh>, do you remember how, how did that room look like in terms of the people there?

Rocio Ortiz: [20:59](#) Um, I couldn't, I wouldn't, I couldn't distinguish specifically the who were, who were undocumented, who were the allies, uh, until you actually got to know the, the person. Um, I just remember, I'm not sure it was the first meeting, but I just remember when they would have like potlucks or food or they always had food, I believe <laugh>. So people would come to their meetings, <laugh>. Um, and, uh, no, I don't think you could tell. Like, I don't think you could tell like who was who you can just, you just, uh, people were just, it just seemed like people were just like normal human beings. Like, normal. Like, we, we forgot we were undocumented. You get me. Like, it just felt like we just felt like one, we just felt like a family. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. It was like undocumented. Who? <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa : [22:13](#) And what made it feel like a family? Was it that sharing their stories and meeting them more on a more personal level or just the um, the vibe?

Rocio Ortiz: [22:28](#) Um, uh, what made it more like a family was when they would share their stories. Uh, when they would talk about like how passionate they were about the movement, what we had to do, how fired up and angry people were about certain things and, and how they worked as a group one that first year is like how they managed to lead us, um, for either a retreat or activities or to tackle a political, political event.

Gloria Sosa : [23:21](#) Okay. So, um, uh, I think we get stop here.