

Transcript for Oral History Interview
Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST428M – Spring 2018
Instructor: Dr. Anne S. Rush

Interviewer's Name: Kendall M. Ohm

Interviewee's Name: Norma (pseudonym)

Interviewee's Country of Origin: Mexico

Interviewee's Current Residence: Rockville, Montgomery County, Maryland, U.S.A.

Date of Interview: March 10, 2018

Place of Interview: College Park, Prince George's County, Maryland, U.S.A.

Introduction: This interview between Kendall Ohm and Norma (pseudonym) explores Norma's experience as an immigrant to the United States from Mexico City. When Norma was just one year old, her family relocated to California to join her father who had been working in the country. When she was eight, they returned to Mexico City, citing a desire to be closer to the rest of their extended family. After middle school, they again relocated to the United States-this time to Rockville, Maryland-because her father could no longer find sustainable work in Mexico. This interview investigates the challenges that Norma faced throughout her childhood, and exemplifies the unique experience she brings to the discussion on the immigrant experience.

Keywords: Mexico City, child, school, green card, nostalgia

[Please note that there is some background noise coming from a room next door periodically throughout the interview]

Kendall: Hello my name is Kendall Ohm, today is the tenth of March 2018, the time is 3:49 pm, I am interviewing Norma, and we are in the McKeldin Library on the University of Maryland, College Park's campus. So, Norma, where are you from?

Norma: I am born from Mexico City.

Kendall: Okay, and can you describe a little bit what life was like there growing up in Mexico City?

Norma: Well, I was born in Mexico City but I left Mexico when I was 1, so I didn't come back to Mexico until I was...9? So I can tell you from 9 to 15. So, um, it was awesome it was, I loved it, I went back at an age where I could really pay attention to the culture, and my whole life I grew up learning how to speak Spanish and English, but I would go visit every year, but being able to live there is where I really embraced the culture. Um, my whole family was there so it was amazing being able to finally be with family. Um, it was loud, it was a lot of people, a lot of traffic, um, I loved the holidays they were just more lively, but I never knew what the holidays were in the U.S. because, um, whenever there were holidays we would always travel to Mexico. So it was just very family-driven, very fun, very, um, I don't know, just, it was home, it was, I loved it.

Kendall: So, you said that you left Mexico City when you were 1-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -can you describe why-

Norma: Yeah!

Kendall: -and where you went from there?

Norma: So, my, when I was born, my dad had moved to California, yeah, no he moved to D.C. and so that whole year that, my first, my first whole year my dad lived in the D.C. area here in Silver Spring. Um, when I turned 1, there was a fluctuation with his job I think he worked for, worked for Amtrak or something like that. Um, and he was given the option to continue in D.C. or move to California. For some reason they chose California, and we moved to Northridge, California, um the valley. So when I was 1, my brother, my sister, my mom and I moved with my dad there, and we lived there from (pause) then until I was like 9 (pause) around there.

Kendall: Do you have any memories-

Norma: (enthusiastically) Yeah!

Kendall: -from California?

Norma: I mean, all my childhood memories are California, like I loved it, I had my best friends, my childhood friends, we lived, um in an apartment complex, 2nd floor, and, I mean, I went to elementary school over there, uh, early 90's so I lived the Rodney King um whole situation in the L.A. when I was over there. I left a year before the big Northr-, Northridge earthquake, um so a lot of you know happy memories from California. I loved it. Um, the, one of the reasons why we left California was my sister was going into middle school and her personality is a person who is very easily influenced, and it was when the whole gang situation was really starting to come up and rising and some of my sister's friends were kind of on that path, and my parents made the decision of, one, of leaving, one because of my sister's easily influenced, and trying to get her away from that circle, and two they wanted us to be with our, be with our family more. My grandparents were getting older, my parents were getting worried and concerned about, you know, us not spending enough time with them. So that was one of the reasons why we moved back to Mexico.

Kendall: Mhm, mhm yeah. So you said that you lived in California during the Rodney King-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -Can you explain-

Norma: So...

Kendall: -what that was?

Norma: So, yeah, so that was in the 90's, um and uh Rodney King, and, rememb-I just know this now as an adult but as a child it was a very different perspective, but it was when Rodney King was um brutalized by police and was found, the police were all found innocent, and even though it was recorded and there were witnesses for it. And so there were a bunch of riots in L.A., uh downtown L.A., and Northridge, if I, if my memory serves me right, is about an hour to 45 minutes away from L.A. We had, at my prim-, at my elementary school, we had students that were brought from downtown L.A. to our school. And, um, I just remember during the riots that many students didn't come to school that lived in the L.A. area, and I was like, "Why isn't Unique coming to school?" and it was because the buses weren't going in or coming out. Um, so I just remember just turning on the TV and watching the news and just all the riots going on, people, you know, going into department buildings and people getting pulled out of cars, and being hit and kicked and um, I even just remember months after my parents taking us to L.A., downtown L.A., and like you could still smell the fire from all the buildings that were lit up and, like there was just a lot of fear going on in the whole area, um racial tension. Because of that.

Kendall: Mhm, was Rodney King, what ethnic-

Norma: Uh black.

Kendall: Okay.

Norma: Yeah.

Kendall: Okay. But the Mexican community still felt that-

Norma: Everybody.

Kendall: -tension as well?

Norma: Everybody. No matter what race you were you just felt that tension in the area it was just a high racially tensioned, um, time. And this was, I wanna say '94, wait '95, it happened in '95 and we ended up leaving in 90, (pause) '98 I wanna say? No, that's not right... I don't know, don't quote me on that, but yeah it was around '95 that Rodney King, yeah [the video footage of King's encounter with police was released in March of 1991 and the officers were acquitted in April 1992, just before the riots began].

Kendall: Mhm.

Norma: Yeah.

Kendall: Okay. Um, so, let's talk a little bit more about your happy memories in California-

Norma: Yeah!

Kendall: -Um, what was school like-you said you went to elementary school in California what was that like?

Norma: I did, um I loved it. I'm a teacher because of my third-grade teacher who was, um, in that school, um our school was very diverse in my opinion. I never felt, you know secluded because of where I was from. I luckily, I, growing up I never had an accent. I learned Spanish and English at the same time, my parents actually didn't know that I spoke English until I was at a family get-together and my aunt had a dog and they only spoke English to the dog, and so I spoke English to the dog and they're like, "Oh my gosh! She speaks English!" I was like, "Yeah the dog doesn't speak Spanish!" So um I learned English and Spanish at the same time. Um, and uh my mom, my brother and my sister, my brother was tested for English as a second language for school, my mom denied services for him cuz she didn't want him stigmatized or get pulled out. Um, my sister, I don't think had to do testing, I don't know. Um but when I went in, they were open-arms, I'm the third so everybody knew me because of my siblings. I had a great experience at Northridge Elementary-loved it. Um my best friends were there, great teachers, just overall very, I remember it being very diverse? It may not have been, just my perception was. Um, yeah, it was just a very simple, common elementary school that treated the whole family really really well. I remember my mom, um, I don't know if she was an official translator or what, but she would come in and help a lot for Hispanic parents. She had broken English but she understood it very well, and so she would come and help support for people to know what their rights were or like at PTA sort of stuff my mom was relatively involved. One of our neighbors who was Colombian-close friends with her-was an assistant at the school, so my mom and her talked a lot about school sort of stuff. And so she was the one that told my mom, "You should come more often", and so my mom did and my mom was a stay-at-home mom, um, and so she was able to be very active with our education. Um, yeah that was elementary for me. I loved it, I loved my elementary school.

Kendall: So you said your third-grade teacher inspired you to become a teacher-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -can you talk about, her?

Norma: Sure! So Mrs. Meyers, um it's interesting because I actually started the year in a different classroom, I had Ms. Montgomery, and Ms. Montgomery had my sister, and my sister was a pill. She, my sister had a reputation that followed her, and once

Ms. Montgomery knew I was my sister's teach-uh, sister, yeah, once she made that connection my mom was like, "Nope! You're getting out of her class." 'Cause she, she was inappropriately mean to my, like unnecessarily mean to my sister. So my mom begged and pleaded for the principal to change my classroom, and they ended up changing me to Mrs. Meyers, who had my brother, and my brother was an angel, so that's why my mom didn't complain about her, but um she was just, I don't know, I just remember the big poufy blonde hair, 80s blonde hair, like poufy, um huge, and I don't know she just was so kind, that was the word that made me love her. Like she was just kind overall and just, um, I don't know we had little chicks in the classroom and she gave us candy when we did good and she had this great little store for us to buy things and I always had fun with her. She was always talking about herself and her kids, she had two twin boys, and she was just very loving and I think that's what made me want to be a teacher, just somebody that you knew that cared for you, and that I don't know you just went to school to have fun. And that's what Mrs. Meyers was, she was, we were there, we learned-I learned a lot, I remember her being very strict. I remember I wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter, um I don't know why Jimmy Carter I don't remember why Jimmy Carter, and we each got a letter back from him. Um, now when I-'cause my mom still has it-now when I see it I'm like, "This is just a photocopy and she just signed Jimmy Carter at the bottom". But it was like that sort of stuff that made us feel important. Um, and made us feel heard and valued and that's what I loved about her. She was, just her demeanor and the way she talked to us, um, yeah, it's because of her.

Kendall: So, was this, right at third grade you're like, "I wanna be a teacher" or when you were reflecting on what you wanted to do-

Norma: No...

Kendall: -is that when you thought back and you were like, that experience-

Norma: I wanted to be a singer and a dancer and an actress. Um, at that time. And even throughout. But I was never good enough at those jobs so I said, "Hey, what's the next best thing?" And it was acting in front of children! And so that's, I was like, "Alright!" Um no I really decided to become a teacher in high school. Um, I was here in Maryland, and I went to Wootton High School and they have this program called child development, and in child development-I really got into child development because I was too lazy to do my community service hours, and going through child development you are able to get child, uh community service hours by doing child development. So I was like, "Oh, that's the easiest way." I also moved here when I was a sophomore so I was already behind the ball, so I had to get my hours quickly, um, so in order to graduate, and so when I started doing it I really, I loved everything about it. I loved the lesson planning, I loved the teaching part, I loved observing the kids, and it was one day when we were in the back room, 'cause it was a 3-week rotation-one week you taught, one week you planned, one week you observed. I don't remember the order exactly but we were in the back room planning for the following week, and like I just got this rush of like, "We can

do this, and we can do this, and we'll have the kids do this, and after that..." So I was planning the whole thing, and we're like a group of I don't know maybe 7 of us? And again this is high school and they're like, "Sure Norma, Norma will, Norma will plan everything. She knows what we're doing." And that's when I was like, "Yes! And we're going to do this..." and like that whole situation that's when I was like, "I can do this! I can, I can be this." And then I got a job in a daycare center and I was like, "Yeah, this is this is what I'm gonna be when I grow up." So, I never really thought about being a teacher until then.

Kendall: That's nice. So, back to California-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -um, what kind of environment was your neighborhood that you grew up in there?

Norma: We lived in an apartment complex, um, Lindley Avenue, I still remember the address and the phone number, don't ask me now um for my last year's address and phone number 'cause I don't. But, um we were on the second floor, it was a 3-bedroom apartment. And it was all outdoors-um in California you don't have buildings like here where um apartment complexes tend to be very high, or at least not where we grew up, and I'm assuming because of the earthquakes, like they try to keep it low. Um, I don't even know how many buildings there were, like how many different complexes within the complex there were. There were a bunch of us. Um, within our individual building, I think we were the only ones on the top-no, there were two on the top floor and two on the bottom floor. Um, and so we were on the top. Um, cozy little apartment, I just um, loved it my best friend lived one building down, um with her grandmother and then across from me was my other-we, we called ourselves the United Colors of Benetton [a clothing store in California] because one was black, one was white, one was Puerto Rican, and then me, Mexican. And we're like, "Los colores, the colors of the world!" Um, and so it was gated, it was a little gated community, and we had a little pool, two playgrounds, it was huge now that I think about it. Um, our individual parking, two parking. Um, it was nice! It was on the side of a major highway and I think that's why it was gated, um across from Grenada Hills High School, which is where my brother was going to go if we had stayed in California but he didn't stay for high school. And, um, yeah, I mean very diverse community as well. Thinking back, I mean we didn't have a lot of money, I knew that, and it wasn't like a wealthy area either, um, but it was middle-class comfortable living, nothing major, that like, I didn't feel like I lived in a poor community. Um, and then I said just very diverse. My parent's best friends lived in the unit, or in another unit and then another one of their best friends lived there. So we had great friends that still to this day um I consider friends and my parents still talk to. Um, and we still see each other if we can. Yeah.

Kendall: That's nice.

Norma: Yeah.

Kendall: So what did you do for fun? I know you said you had a lot, group, tight-knit group of friends, what did you guys like to do-

Norma: In California?

Kendall: -around the area? Yeah!

Norma: Um, well we always stayed within the complex, we were never allowed out of it-again we were little. Um, I don't know we did a bunch of things. We played Barbies, played on the tire swings, at the pool-we had a community pool that I think was open year-round, um yeah 'cause it's California you don't need to close it down! Um, I don't know we, we put on a lot of shows, we loved music, my best friend Jasmine and I loved to do performances, so we were always dancing we were always you know kids' things, just playing with the dolls and playing with the cars and, um, whenever we could be outside we'd be outside. And we were out-and there was a balcony, and there was a certain line that I wasn't allowed to cross 'cause that was the dark side of the building. And by dark I just mean like, I don't know I just remember as a kid the trees were taller and it was just a darker area. And my mom couldn't see me past that line and I always had to stay within the area and she would yell out she would come out on the balcony and yell out, "Norma!" And same Jasmine's grandmother would yell out, "Jasmine!" and then we'd come running inside. Um, my brother when one Christmas we went to Mexico and he got um (pause) um, what's the word, an avalancha is the word in Spanish, but it's like a, like a little skateboard but that you can sit on and it has a steering wheel-I don't know if they, they didn't exist here at the time. And so he brought it, and all of us would like always jump on it and there was this one ramp, and all of us in the complex would like go and ride through that. Um you know, we stayed away from the sandbox because it was the kitty litter and you know just we played outside all the time. We were always outside. My parents are very traditional so I wasn't allowed to go inside my friend's homes, um without their explicit permission and for more than 5 minutes. Um, so I never was really inside my friend's homes-they would come into my home, and my best friend Jasmine, who's black, um she my dad would come home from work and she would give him a kiss on the cheek just like we did 'cause the rule at house was always Spanish, she would try to speak Spanish too and naranja [orange in Spanish]. I remember her practicing over and over-naranja. And so we just had a great time I mean it was a lot of fun and I don't know Halloween was the best, was my favorite one because living in an apartment complex there's not much walking you had to do just knock on every door. Um, and yeah, Halloween in California is totally different too. It's like a full-out event, everybody, everybody does Halloween over there. Um, yeah that was probably my favorite thing when we were there. Yeah, I mean we just played. Just played played played. Yeah.

Kendall: So, now that you talk to your brother who was apparently much older than you-

Norma: Mhm, 6 years.

Kendall: -and your sister was also older than you-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -did they have much different experiences rather than, you know just playing outside, did they have...

Norma: Umm, I don't know to be honest with you. Um, I was, so, my brother is 6 years older than I am and my sister's 4 years older than I am. So at first I was my brother's pet when we were little. Um, and he took me everywhere. And then, you know, he hit puberty and it kind of like pushed me aside, and then him and his, my sister were very close 'cause they're just two years apart. So they were very very close and they kinda did their own thing, um, I would try to play, like be with them but they never wanted me around. So I would just kinda do my thing. Um, and my sister and I shared a room so it was more bickering between me and my sister 'cause I'm the little one and I'm a brat and I wanted to do everything she was doing and I wanted to you know I wanted to just be with her and she didn't want me, um. And my brother being the only guy it was, it was a completely different interaction with him. Um, I don't know if their experiences were the same or different. I know my sister had a harder time in general just because she was always getting in trouble at school, she was getting bad grades, like she herself her personality is very rebellious. Um, so my brother and my sister and I started at the same elementary school, and at some point my sister was transferred to another school. I don't know why, I never asked, um, yeah I don't know why. But my br-my brother and I ended up finishing, er, our whole time at the same elementary school. And, so I don't know my sister's friends were, my sister's friends from school were more badass, I wanna say, but again that could be little sister perspective, um and within the community complex I honestly don't know who my sister's friends were, um, 'cause I just kinda did my thing with mine. I know who my brother's friends, or friend was, and then my brother played football, um, across the street at the high school. So he would go over there and play football a lot. Um, I don't know who my sister's-I should ask her. I don't know who her friends were in the complex, yeah (smiles), I should (laughs).

Kendall: So, I know you said your dad initially worked in DC and you guys were back in Mexico City and then he moved, to California-

Norma: To California, mhm.

Kendall: -and I didn't quite, quite catch, um why did you guys move with him to California?

Norma: So, I think it had always been the thought that we would move with my dad, so, backtracking a little bit more...my dad used to work with miners, not like minor children but like miners in the mines in Mexico. Um, and once my parents got married and they had my brother, my dad knew that he had to do something

different because he was always traveling, he was always out of town because of work. Um, and with my brother and then my sister he knew he needed something different. So, he ended up going back to school in Mexico and he studied, um technology. So he was one of the first to like delve into the whole computers and I.T. and all that sort of stuff. Um, but he also knew that in order to be good at it he had to learn English better. So he, um, and I don't really know the timeline for when, it might have been before my brother, he moved in with my aunt who lived in California. To learn English, so he went to school-it was before-he went to school and learned English and all that sort of stuff, met the woman who introduced my parents, so it was before they had babies. Um, or before they met. So when he then, fast forward to when he started studying computers and all that sort of stuff, the school that he was at, the U.S. started recruiting from Mexico. So him, a good friend of his, um, and then another one that I know of, um, ended up moving to the U.S. So that's when my dad ended up in the Silver Spring area. And because of that he just chose California I'm assuming California because of there were more Spanish speakers, it was closer to Mexico, so it would be easier to be able to travel. He ended up working for Continental Airlines, so it was actually perfect because we were able to get cheap fares-that's why we were able to travel to Mexico at least once or twice a year, Um, once we were born. But it was the whole, "Let me go first. Let me settle, find where we're going to live" and all that sort of stuff, And it worked out really well because my dad and another person from his cohort were living in California in the same apartment complex, and so my mom, when we first moved, my mom became really close friends with his wife who was American. Um, but spoke Spanish, because then she kinda taught her the ins and outs of American-, American living and where to grocery shop, and just how to do stuff here versus how to do stuff in Mexico. Um, they ended up moving to Kansas and we moved to another complex, but they, they still have great friendships to this day. Yeah.

Kendall: So when you say he kind of knew all along that you guys were gonna end up meeting him in the U.S.-

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: -did he have, did he foresee moving back to Mexico at all beforehand?

Norma: I don't think so. Um, I don't know if that was his long-term plan, um, but it was very natural. I think, the reason why I say no is because we lived in California with a green card, and so I don't know if you know much about green cards but they're temporary and you have to renew every 6 months, or every 6 years or so or whatever. Um, and so that's the reason why I think no because they never pursued citizenship, which back then would have been a lot easier than now. And so when we did end up moving back to Mexico, that was one of the things that my parents were always concerned about because they didn't know if we would end up in Mexico forever. And so it was 'All right, how do we keep our residency? How do we not lose our residency but still be able to live in Mexico?' And so here's where we got a little muddied and a little illegal, um, in that we lived in Mexico and traveled

to the U.S. every 6 months to show that we were paying taxes in some form, we would purchase a bunch of things and then go back to Mexico. And, um, so we would drive up to Loreto and, and we would drive on purpose so that the car was in the U.S. 'cause we bought the car in the U.S. so we would get it serviced in the U.S. jus to kinda prove that we were in the area or in the states. Um, and so I think my dad knew that having the residency was important, and that we should all keep it because you never know where you're going to end up. And that's something that he says to me all the time: "You never knew where you're gonna end up. You're gonna have to think about the future. You never know where you're gonna end up." And so when we ended up moving back to Mexico, I think he just wanted to be cautious 'cause you never know where you're gonna end up. Um, but I don't, I don't think he thought for us to live forever in the U.S. I don't. Just he wanted us to be cautious. Yeah.

Kendall: Did that ever run, did that ever cause any problems, doing that whole drive up to the U.S.?

Norma: Um, I don't know about problems versus more stress. Um, 'cause it was a long trip from Mexico City up. It, it was a family trip, so we ended up all going. Um, we would stop by my mom's hometown, our, by my mom's siblings on the way up. I don't know if it caused us much stress, but again I'm little so I don't know the conversations behind closed doors between my parents. Um, I do remember them having us practice our U.S. address just in case immigration asking us, and I do remember them telling us, "Tell you've been on vacation in Mexico, you've been on vacation for 6 weeks, --er 6 months." They would tell us 6 months 'cause that's the max you can be out of the country with a, with a residency. Um, you've been out for 6 months but what are you doing for school-we've been homeschooled. And so they would have us practice those types of things. Um, and I think it was just passing immigration where the stress came in, and we could feel it. Like we had to be quiet in the back seat or pretend that we were sleeping whenever we crossed the border. But never, I think because we had the residency we were never too nervous we were just scared they would catch us that we were doing this back and forth and back and forth. Um, but we, my brother and my sister and I loved it 'cause that's when we got to come to the U.S., have Oreos, have like, we would buy all the junk food from the U.S. that we couldn't get in Mexico, drink milk because the milk is different here and there, and we preferred the U.S. milk. Um, so for us it was that, it was like, "Oh, we get to have all the junk food we love!" Um, but I don't, I'm sure for my parents it was scary or stressful or all of the above. Um, but we never really got to see that part.

Kendall: So when you traveled up where exactly did you go back to Northridge or, where-

Norma: No, no no we went straight into Loreto [a city located on the Gulf of California], stayed there for maybe a day, and then went straight back to Mexico. Yeah it was usually a weekend trip. So it was a long drive, um I don't even know how many hours it was but we would just go. Like I remember when we did it, when we would

do it, when my mom went to sleep I would stay awake just to accompany my dad, um, so I just remember the trips him being like, "We're not stopping, we're just going, we're not stopping" and I would just stand uh, stay, stay seated but stay in my seat and just be like, "So, where are we now?" and, "How do you know how to drive at night?" Like I would talk to him worried that everybody's asleep and my dad's the only one awake right now. Um, yeah, but I don't know, I don't know if I miss those trips, I liked us spending time together-the last couple ones my brother stopped going I don't know why. Um, but yeah. Yeah.

Kendall: So did you continue these trips the whole, how long were you in Mexico City before you moved back to the U.S.?

Norma: So we were in Mexico, I left in 3rd grade, California I left in 3rd grade, and we lived in Mexico until I was in 9th grade--yeah, so 6 years. Um, and the reason why we ended up moving back here is because my dad lost his job in Mexico. So this is when I was in middle school, he lost his job. Or I was entering middle school. And in Mexico the more you worked for a company the more experienced you are the more expensive you are, so my dad was too expensive to keep on board. So they let him go; he worked for an airline, they let him go, and for a while my dad tried selling shoes, he tried selling meat, we tried selling, um, creams. My mom's hometown is known for shoes, so we would go to my mom's hometown, we'd pick up our shipment and then we would sell them at an elementary school for their uniform. And, it just wasn't enough. And, it didn't end up being enough for us. And my dad's very smart with money. He knew how to manage himself really well so he was able to live 2 years without a steady income without a job. Um, but he was constantly searching, and he wanted to stay in Mexico. I could tell that he wanted 'cause he kept on going on interviews, he kept on looking for jobs. One of his friends gave him, was able to find him a job as a subcontractor for his insurance company, and my dad stayed there until the position no longer was available. Um and he kept interviewing and applying and applying and applying and nobody was picking him up, he was too expensive. But, at some point he said, "I'm gonna try in the U.S. again", and the moment he put in his name he was constantly getting called. Like I remember picking up the phone and, so-and-so company, and so-and-so company and so-and-so, and it was like an outpouring-they wanted him. And so my dad ended up getting a job at Marriott headquarters here in Bethesda. And so that's what brought us back, or he came for a year again so that my brother could finish, no my brother was still in college, my sister could finish high school, and I could finish middle school. So we would come here starting straight and fresh. Um, so we ended up being in Mexico, I wanna say a year, it may have been 2, but I wanna say a year, again without my dad. Um, while he was here just starting up, finding a home for us to be able to move to, move in to. So, yeah, that's why we left, that's why we ended up leaving Mexico again. Um, which was much harder that second round because, like you know you're older at that point, you have your friendships kinda settled and my brother had a girlfriend at the time, my sister had a boyfriend. And so it was much, it was a much harder move and for me it was, "But wait I'm with my family here" and you know, "I don't know anybody there" and I was scared

because of that, "I don't know anybody there" but like my grandparents were getting older and I was very attached to my grandfather. Um, and you know my whole family was there and a big thing about our culture is like that family unity that family sticks together, and like the family helps each other out and so it was kinda like, "Wait we don't have anybody there!" At least in California we had some aunts, we had my dad's cousins. And so we had family in California but in Maryland, I didn't even know where it was on the map. Um, so it was a little nerve-racking. But, been here ever since. Yeah...

Kendall: So, I know you said your dad trained with technology-

Norma: Mhm!

Kendall: -and computers, but then you said he worked for airlines...was he doing technology stuff with the airlines or was he-

Norma: Yeah, so he was, don't quote me on this I've asked him and still don't know, he was when some things are going wrong with the system, for reservations or things like that, he's like that back person for the system. And so he did that for the airlines, and he did that Continental, he did that for Aeromexico in Mexico, and he did that for Marriott when we came here too.

Kendall: Okay.

Norma: Yeah, always computers.

Kendall: Okay, just wanted to clear that up if he couldn't find a job with technology or what he ended up doing.

Norma: Yeah...

Kendall: Um, so you say that you and your siblings were kind of against moving back to the U.S., did you put any of that resentment out in the open to your parents, or?

Norma: Um, I did not, as much. Um, my sister did. She ended up running away from home and moving back to Mexico less than a year after. Um, my brother ended up staying in Mexico, he stayed in our apartment because he was finishing um his degree. So, the deal was my brother would stay and my sister and I would come. Um, my sister, I enrolled in high school 'cause 9th grade in Mexico is the end of middle school, but it's already the first year in high school here. So I enrolled in high school, 10th grade, and my sister enrolled at Montgomery College, and she had a job, and she hated it. Um, her boyfriend came to visit I wanna say a couple of times, I don't remember. Um, and so we moved here in August and by March she had left. So, she did not like it (laughs). Um, I had a very hard time. I would wake up every night, like kind of wishing, like 'this is a dream, this is a dream, I'm gonna wake up and I'm gonna be in Mexico, I'm gonna wake up and I'm gonna be in Mexico.' And

that was a long time. Um, I had great friends here, I made good friends here, but I, to this day, every once in a while, I still have that feeling of 'I'm gonna wake up, I'm gonna be back home. I'm gonna wake up and I'm gonna be back home and...' When I dream of home, I dream of my apartment in Mexico, and I dream of being in Mexico again, so. It's not resentment, it's just, it is what it is and now as a mom and, I see that my parents did what they thought was best for us. And I understand that. But, it just was, like leaving from California to Mexico I was like, "Oh my gosh my friends!" But then leaving Mexico to here it was, "My friends and my family and my culture." Um, I remember the day we arrived here in Maryland we're in the shuttle to take us to the car, and we were in Montgomery County and I'm like, "Where are the sidewalks? There's no sidewalks!" Again, city girl coming from Mexico City and even California, downtown L.A., like you just see sidewalks and you see people, and moving here I was like, "There's nobody on the streets!" and it was in the middle of the summer. I was like, "There's, there's nobody!" And so I really faced a culture shock, even though I had lived in California I still faced a culture shock. Um, 'cause East coast and West coast are very different. And I didn't know anybody. And so, I used to say that my best friend was John Weber and John Weber was my parent's realtor, and so when my dad lived here he lived in a 1-bedroom apartment, and they had a contract on a home, 'cause my mom had come to visit to help find a home, whatever for when we got here we actually had a home. But the home inspection went through and didn't pass, so yeah, we had to live in that 1-bedroom apartment, the 4 of us, while they looked for another house. And so John Weber would take us to tour homes, and I would be like, "My friend John Weber! I have a friend named John Weber!" And so that's like, that was the running joke of like, "Norma do you wanna call your friend John Weber?" "Yes! I wanna call somebody!" (laughs) 'Cause you know, like teenager, I wanted friends, I didn't know anybody. And so that was, it was hard, and then it got even harder when my sister left. When she, 'cause she left without saying goodbye, she just kinda disappeared. And, um, at that point she and I had become really close, like we shared a bedroom in California, we shared a bedroom in Mexico, when we moved here we each had our own bedroom but we still slept in the same room. Um, we got close. And it was, it was hard when she left.

Kendall: Do you still talk to her, is she still in Mexico?

Norma: Of course! Oh yeah, yes, my broth, my, so huh, my brother graduated college, moved here, um...Did he move here married? No. He moved here, still dating the same girlfriend, um, got married, they both, she moved here, um, and applied for citizenship, or residency applied for residency. So during that time she ends up being deported, that's a whole other story. Um, he moves back so now both my brother and my sister are in Mexico. So my brother did live here for a little bit. And, um, but now they're both in Mexico and but, yes I'm very, still very close to both of them. Um, for a while my sister and I, my sister stopped talking to all of us, after she ran away. But, years passed by and we always tried to reach out to her and eventually she came back and when she got pregnant is when the whole family just kinda was like "You know what, everything's forgiven, everything's forgotten, let's

get back to like, be a family again." Um, and so that's when even my dad and her kinda patched a couple of things and, my sister is amazing. Like I love, like she's that free spirit type of person that, she just didn't fit here. And I can see that. She, she's very, like she got me this bag (show a vibrantly colored bag), like she's, she's as colorful as this bag. She's just full of life and just very vivacious and being here in Maryland, she kept saying she's like, "I'm suffocating here, I'm suffocating, I don't have the culture and I don't have the colors and I don't have the music", and for her it's that, that's a part of who she is and that's a part of what she needed and, aside from the boyfriend, which is one of the reasons why she moved here, I think just the, I think just the way of life here wasn't what she, what she could live with. And so she decided to, to leave. And as painful as it was, it's what she needed and so I respect that, that she took the courage and said, "This is not for me" and went back.

Kendall: And you never, you were able to kind of assimilate more you would say?

Norma: I think so because I (pauses), I think so because (pause) I want, am closer to my parents, always have been. Um, I didn't wanna abandon my mom, I saw the pain in my parent's eyes when she left. And I was young, I couldn't, I couldn't leave. Um, and I think because, just how young I was when I was like, they were older when they moved to California my brother was 7 my sister was 5 or 6, no she was probably 6, my brother was maybe 8. Um, like they knew what it was like to be there before I did. I never knew 'cause I like for me yes, I was born in Mexico but I really grew up in the U.S. Um, whereas for them they were born and grew up in the U.S. and then moved, I mean born and raised in Mexico and then moved to the U.S. So I think she just really missed it whereas for me I was like, "Okay...". And I'm more adaptable then she is I wanna say (laughs). Um, it was easier for me to assimilate, yes. Yeah.

Kendall: So you say that when you first moved you also experienced a culture shock.

Norma: Yes.

Kendall: And it was hard for you to make friends and feel welcomed. Um, can you speak a little bit to that culture shock and what the differences are and-

Norma: So first it was, "There's no people on the sidewalk." Um, I was used to public transportation going anywhere I wanted and like, that was my independence, whereas here it was like I really relied on my parents to take me anywhere. And that was weird. Um, I, yeah it was super weird for me. Um, I remember getting on the school bus, and that was weird. I had never ridden on a school bus before. In Mexico you don't ride the school bus you ride the public transportation bus or your parents take you to school. Um, and so people weren't very welcoming, and they just, that just might be high school life, had nothing to do with where I was from. Um, the high school that I went to was very Asian or white, Asian or white, Asian or white. There were probably 10 Hispanics, and I'm exaggerating with the 10. Um,

that's why I got to stay in that high school even when we moved out of the area for the school they wanted to keep their Hispanic number. Um, and people were friendly. I don't wanna say they weren't but um, lockers, I had never used a locker before. The day before school my anxiety was on a locker I didn't know how to open a lock so my dad went out and bought me a locker, a lock so that I could practice that. And then I couldn't open the damn thing! (laughs) I couldn't open my damn locker and I missed the bus on the way home! My sister of course made fun of me (laughs). Um, it was that sort of stuff and then like the huge high school building and I would be, and I remember I started the same day this other girl Maria who just, had just moved from Greece, um started, so she and I kinda like, "Hey, you're new, I'm new, let's be best friends!" She was a year older than I was, and she would tell me, I would talk to her and she would say, "Norma you're speaking Spanish." I'm like "Oh..." I wouldn't even notice when I would change languages. Um, even though I was fully bilingual, I could speak in both, but just all of a sudden the more comfortable I got in speaking I would just change. Um, my first day of school I walked into the men's restroom thinking M was for Mujeres [women in Spanish] (we both laugh). Um, there were just a couple of things that I had to remind myself I'm not in Mexico (laughs). Um, yeah. So the people weren't terrible, I just, maybe I was just harder on it just because, you know, it's the age where you're just, "Ahhh I wanna go home!" Um, I didn't like my high school experience but I don't know if it's because of the high school or because I was forced to be here instead of where I wanted to be. Um, I made great friends but, again, my friends were all Hispanic or black, or Maria, who's Greek. Like they were international. And not to say that I didn't approach other people, I did, but I just felt more comfortable with, with minorities in the building that weren't many. Or even with the building service guy. Um, I felt more comfortable with them and so, yeah. That was kind of high school for me. It, and it, it, I think the hardest thing for me too was that my parents always said, "We may live in the U.S. but we're Mexican." And so that meant really early curfews, so my friends wanted to go out and I had to be home by 11. And that meant, that meant, "You're not allowed to go to other people's houses." That meant, "You're not allowed, boys aren't allowed in the house." Like, it just had a lot of restrictions that people from here didn't understand. And the people from here who understand were the people who were like me. Um, so that was probably the most stressful or annoying part as a teenager of like, "Yes, I get it we're from Mexico but things don't work like that here." Um, so yeah that was high school.

Kendall: So you say that it was difficult for you but this was the time that you were realizing that teaching was what you wanted to do, correct?

Norma: Mhm, mhm.

Kendall: Is this when you did the teaching?

Norma: Yeah...

Kendall: So did that kind of make it-

Norma: Umm..

Kendall: -better?

Norma: Yes and no... I, my dad is a very macho type of man, um, very strict, very, and so and after my sister ran, my sister left, I became an only child, so all the attention was always on me. So I just wanted to get out of the house. So I got 2 jobs, and, um, I got a daycare job and I got a job at a country club. And so at, between daycare and child development that's when I was like, "I wanna be a teacher, that's what I wanna be when I grow up." And, um, it was just, it just kinda naturally fell into my lap and then after that it was, "Alright where are you gonna go to school?" Went to Montgomery College, loved it. Um, after, "What are you gonna do now?" Try to go away (laughs) but, wasn't happening with my dad. Um, and then I was like, "Alright, I'm gonna go to Maryland [University of Maryland, College Park]." And he was like, "Well if you're gonna go to Maryland you're still commuting." And I was like, "Screw that, I'm not commuting!" They live in Germantown I was like "I'm not commuting from here to there." It's like commuting from Frederick, like no! Not doing that! And so, um, I ended up to University at Shady Grove, so just kinda followed a path towards education. And I'm lucky that it was here and everything was just so close and so easy and so, that's kinda how that fell through (laughs).

Kendall: Do your mom and dad still live here-

Norma: Mhm!

Kendall: -or did they move back to Mexico?

Norma: Nope, no no no, they're here, thankfully, they help me with my kiddos. Um, they still live in the same house. My, my dad retired first and then my mom soon followed. Um, my mom is one to go more often to Mexico. They're still, um, well my dad will still go not as often ever since my grandmother passed, um he used to go more routinely to go see his mom. Um, but uh, recently we all just got to do a trip, my, one of my cousin's got marr-um, married and so we all got to go and I hadn't, my brother and my sister hadn't met my son, I hadn't met my son-my brother's son, um, and so it was really nice and we haven't all of us haven't been together, oof, years I wanna say...When's the last time we were all together? And I mean like all by like me, my brother, my sister, my parents, um, I wanna say my wedding? Yeah...since my wedding, so it had been 5 years since we'd all been together. Um, and my nephew wasn't born yet, my kids weren't born yet so it was really really nice to be with, all of us to be in the same room together. And I think that's what hurts me the most, that, like, I don't get to see my nieces and my nephews and, um, I don't get to see them being born and all that sort of stuff is the hardest (begins to cry), um so I get very emotional with that just because of, um, I'm always the one being left out. They get to experience that, each other, and they stay with

my cousins and all of that whereas I'm here, I'm blessed because I get to see my parents every day and so my sister's like, "You're so lucky you get to see mom!" And I'm like, "You're so lucky you get to see the babies!" Um, so everybody's grass is greener, um but I just kinda wish we could be in a place where we're all together, but I have always been the one that's been forced to be away. So, maybe one day.

Kendall: So you say, I'm sorry-

Norma: No you're fine, you're fine! (laughs)

Kendall: Um, shoulda had those tissues... (both laugh).

Norma: (laughing) It's fine!

Kendall: So you say, "Forced to be away"; have you ever considered moving with your family back, is that a possibility, and your parents also?

Norma: So, my parents are now at an age where I can't leave them. Uh, they have nobody to take care of them. I've said that to them, and they're like, "Don't you dare plan your future based on us, we're fine!" They've talked about moving to Atlanta, or they've talked about moving to Dallas, it's cheaper cost of living down there. Um, recently they were talking about moving back to Mexico, um, so I don't know what my parent's future looks like. For us, it's hard, my husband's from here, his family is Ecuadorian, but he was born in the U.S. Um, my kids are more American than not. They do, they barely speak Spanish-I try for them to speak Spanish but my daughter is oh so stubborn. Um, funny you ask that because for the wedding we didn't go to Mexico City, we went to Medidas, which is 4 hours from Cancun, so a nice warm climate, it's a beautiful city-very calm, very clean, just, just very nice place. And so I asked my husband, I said, "Would you be willing to move here?" And at first he was like, "No." But then he thought about it he's like, "You know what, I would." And so that kind of, has planted a seed in my brain. And then this whole school shooting and put guns in teacher's hands, I'm like, "If that happens, I am out of the public school system! I'm not teaching, my kids won't be here, and we're moving to Mexico." Um, so if that happens then yes 100% I will move back. I would like just kinda like what my parents did with us, I would like to move for a year or 2, but my parents husbands are here, I mean my husband's parents (laughs) are here. And I can't do that to him. I know what it's like to be separated from my family, I know that pain, and I don't wanna do that to him. Um, so I don't wanna say no, that'll never happen, it's always a possibility. I would love for that to happen, um, but I don't know when, um, I think it would be best for it to happen when my kids are still young and they're-it's easier to make friends and it's easier for them to acclimate. I have a friend who actually did that, they moved to Mexico for about 2-3 years. They're gonna do that for 2 or 3 years, and when I see her stories on Facebook about her daughter speaking Spanish and how they're embracing the culture, it, it makes me jealous like, I wanna do that. So, who knows? I'm, I'm not, against it. I would love it. We'll see. Gun control will help me decide (laughs).

Kendall: My mom says the same thing [Norma and the interviewer's mother teach together at the same school and are friends] (both laugh).

Norma: We were talking about that the other day (laughs).

Kendall: Um, yeah...um, so since high school have you felt that it's kind of your responsibility to stay here as long as your parents stay here? Like has it really been your decision?

Norma: I don't think it's been since high school, (to herself) has it? Yeah, it has been. It has been, because I have, I've always, as I said, I'm close, I'm the closest one to my parents. And I'm also the one that's lived with them the longest. My, my brother when he had to go back he was 25, that was, oh my gosh how long ago was that? That was almost 13 years ago that my brother left. My sister left when she was 20? So it's, I'm the one that's lived with them the longest. I'm the one that knows how to kinda acclimate my father's bad temper. I'm the one that, and my kids are the ones that make my parents still feel young, they take, they help me out with my kids, um, several days a week. And so I could. I've seen my dad moving more when the baby's there, I see my mom like more active and just, like they, the kids help them keep an active lifestyle. And I feel that if we were to take that away from them my parents would deteriorate very easily very quickly.

Kendall: So, I wanna go back to, we kinda briefly went over your journey from Mexico to California versus your second journey from Mexico to Montgomery County.

Norma: Mhm.

Kendall: Um, I kinda wanna know, you said it was much more difficult the move, what do you remember that day specifically that you moved from Mexico to here?

Norma: Ugh, you're gonna make me cry again. Um, yes I remember that day. Um, I remember the airport. I remember the whole family was there. Everybody was there. My aunts, my cousins, my uncles. Um, my brother. I remember hugging everybody. I remember my grandfather was the last person I hugged. Um, and I remember thinking, 'I may never see him again' (begins crying). Um, they were getting older. Um, I remember sitting in the plane, and this happens every time I go to Mexico, I was sitting next to my sister, and I just closed my eyes and I said, "Make it not be true, make it not be true, make it not be true." Um, and I just remember my grandfather's hug the most, and so every time that I leave Mexico it just kinda repeats in my eyes, 'Make it not be true, make it not be true, make it not be true.' Um, and I just remember like that drowning feeling of "crap, we gotta go." I know that my dad being alone isn't ideal either, so I understand why we had to come back, um, he would call my mom in the middle of the night just so lonely, so lonely. 'Cause when my dad was gone I would sleep with my mom to keep her company. And, and I remember telling my mom once, "If you want us to go we'll

go, if you want us to go we'll go." And then in the plane thinking, 'Shit, this is my fault, I told them it was okay for us to go.' But again, it's not fair to my dad to have to be alone. Um, I remember when we arrived here, uh, it was so hot. It was August. It was so hot. Um, and I just remember thinking, 'Alright, we have to remember how things are here, we have to remember like it's English', like just that sort of stuff that we had to remind ourselves and we never lost our English. We were all still pretty fluent and we were all still pretty good with the language. Um, I (chuckling) I remember we got to the apartment where my dad lived and opening the fridge and all he had was one pack of cigarettes and there was no food. And so my mom's like, "Alright, we have to go get food!" And so we got--Did we have a car? I wanna say we had a car--yeah we had a car! Um, we had a van, we had the van, the same van. 'Cause my dad drove up in the van? I don't know. I think I wanna say yes, I don't remember. Um, yeah my dad drove up in the van the same van that took us down to Mexico was the van that brought my parents here to Maryland. And, um, I, kinda like when we went to Loreto it was like, "Oh my gosh! Sun-kissed orange juice! Let's get that oh my gosh the Oreos!" So my sister and I were excited at that point at the grocery store. And then we went to go eat Chinese food and we're like, "Ahhhh, real Chinese food!" Um, so that, food is a big part, for us so that was like the emotional eating part of it. And the waiter looked like one of my cousins (smiling), I remember that. Um, so that's, that's what I remember from the move back, but the hardest part was hugging my grandfather and saying goodbye to him. That was the hardest one.

Kendall: Was that the last time that you saw him?

Norma: Luckily it was not, it was not. My grandfather lived--how long ago did my grandfather pass? I had just graduated college...so, I'm 34, graduated when I, he passed in 200...4. Um, yeah I had just, I was in my last week of my internship and graduation was on Sun-, was on Saturday, and my grandfather passed on Thursday before so I did not get to walk the stage. But I got to see my family. Um, funny story, when my grandfather passed, not that funny, um I so we packed our things last minute, head to the airport, I can't go because my passport has expired. So, and because I'm not a citizen, or I wasn't a citizen at the time, um, I had to get my passport renewed in order for me to be able to leave the country. I had my green card, but not my passport. So, I had to miss my grandfather's, um, funeral because I had to go to the embassy and get that all that taken care of. So I arrived the day after, which everybody says is a blessing because my last image of my grandfather is not him in a casket, so I don't know. I don't know if that's true or not but, um, that was one of the flaws of like that whole situation like just, "I have a passport, just it's expired, just let me go!" And they didn't let me go, because I wouldn't have been able to be let back into the country with an expired passport. But, I was able to see where he's buried. Um, my grandmother passed not that long ago. Um, 5 years ago, 4 years ago. And so my grandmother passed, but my grandpa was my teddy bear. He was, he was my teddy bear. Yeah. And so my name is, my son is named after my grandfather. So I keep him alive like that. And I love it when I yell at son, 'cause I yell it with my grandmother's tongue: "Guillermo!" And I'm like, "Wait, that was

my grandmother!" So, I love it, hearing it even though I don't (laughs). So it's, it's nice to be able to repeat that. Yeah...

Kendall: So, do both your parents and your, well family have full citizenship now?

Norma: I'm the only one that does.

Kendall: Okay.

Norma: Um, so, I can't remember what made me decide to get it, to be honest with you. Oh! I remember. Um, my green card was expiring, and it was an option between paying \$700 for a green card or like \$5-something for citizenship. And at that point I was engaged and I said to myself, 'Norma...' For the longest time I didn't want to become a citizen, my, my parents had told me, "You should you should you should you should you should." Um, and I was kind of against it 'cause I was like, "No, I'm Mexican. I'm Mexican. I don't wanna give that up." And so it was a big struggle of identity. Of, if I become a U.S. citizen I lose my Mexicanism. And one of my biggest pet peeves is when people call me gringa, which is how they call Americans, and so I would go to Mexico and they would all be, "Oh you're such a gringa, you're such a gringa! Gringa! Gringa!" And I'm like, "No, I'm Mexican! I'm Mexican! I carry it in my heart, it's in my blood and my soul!" And so I felt that becoming an American citizen was me betraying my country and my people and accepting that yes, in fact I was a gringa. So, it was that big struggle. But then at this point I'm engaged, I'm, I bought a house, or a condo, I, I live here, my job is here, my life is here. And I was like, 'Norma, it just doesn't make sense, just get your citizenship and get it done pretty easily'. Um, and it was, it was a very very easy process, very simple. Uh, they even forgot to give me my citizenship test because I think because I'm a teacher and all that sort of stuff. My biggest fear though with the whole application process was our time that we lived in Mexico and we would travel back and forth. That's--that was my biggest fear going in. 'Are they going to ask me about that?' And nowhere did I really disclose it, they don't really ask you for that part. But I didn't disclose it either, and so my parents were kind of scared of what would happen if they found out that we weren't living here at the time. And, but when I went in, the lady and I just started talking, just talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and talk, and she's just like, "Okay! Can you just come back at 2?" And I was like, "Sure!" She's like "Alright, congratulations, you passed." So I walk out of the building and she calls me back and she's like, "I forgot to ask you the questions!" I'm like, "Okay!" So I ran back up the stairs, and she asked me, like, who was the President, how many stars are in the flag, like it was really, really dumb questions, like stuff like that. And here I'd been studying like, who are the representatives, who, like, names of people and I'm like, 'I shouldn't have studied that hard'. Um, and so that is when I became, July 31st, was when I became a citizen. And I'm the only one, so my parents now, have been thinking about it, um, especially with them retiring. If they moved to Mexico, they want to be able to still be able to claim their retirement, um, but again, they're scared about that whole inner part of, they weren't living here. But now that they've been living

here for more than 15 years past that time, I think they're a little bit more comfortable. However with the current administration they're not very sure if they wanna do it now. Um, they kinda kick themselves for not doing it before when Obama was, um, in office. Um, 'cause yeah that's, that's kinda tricky. Um, yeah. My mom always has trouble coming into the U.S. She has a green card that's one of the really really old ones, that she does not have to renew, and so every time she goes through immigration they question that green card, and they always take her to the back office. And even though, like everything's legal, everything is clear, it, it's always like (breathes in deeply), "What's gonna happen?" As I mentioned earlier, my sister-in-law, my former sister-in-law, she got deported and everything was legal, everything was clean, everything had been cleared and they sent her back and she can never come back into the United States 'cause she's now considered a criminal. And all she did was go to Mexico for Christmas and supposedly she wasn't allowed to leave the country during that time, um, there's just too many rules but if you ask one agent they'll tell you one answer and if you ask another agent they'll tell you a different answer, so it's, it's always scary having to go through immigration. Even now with my citizenship-, with my American passport, I still get nervous. My husband's always like, "What's wrong with you?" And I'm like, "It's immigration, I'm scared! I'm too brown for immigration!" So, I don't, just always makes us nervous. Um, passing through. No matter what.

Kendall: Is that like a common feeling among the Mexican population? Especially now...

Norma: Um, I think especially now, and after 9/11. Things, things just got really like, er on top of, and not, I don't wanna say just Mexicans, 'cause I think on top of everybody. Now that they ask, you have to get fingerprinted when you're passing immigration, and you get your picture taken, it kinda makes you feel like a criminal when you're passing through immigration. Um, I get it, I wanna say? But, it really also depends on the agent that you get, which is the unfortunate part of it all. Um, coming in and out of the U.S. is already nerve-racking and like terrible, but then coming in and having an agent who doesn't like you just because, and you're just like, "Come on, man. Everything's there. I'm not..." And so, it just really sucks. And then, the U.S. makes it hard for, for Mexicans to be able to come, um, the visa is over \$100 to be able to apply for, and you're not guaranteed to get a visa even after you've paid. So my sister's now is expired, both my brother and my sister's green cards are expired, um, and so my sister's visa is expired she's like, "Norma, I can't afford to pay \$100 and then maybe not get it." So I get that, I totally get it. Um, so that's one of the reasons why she doesn't come, aside from the fact that she doesn't have the finances to be able to come. And then my brother's a whole other story of why he doesn't come, so it just, it makes it rough for them to be able to visit and it's just sucks. So it's really on us to be able to go there. But, teacher salaries can't pay for 4 kids-for all 4 of us to go all the time either. So, yeah (laughs).

Kendall: Um, one thing I wanted to ask you, we didn't really talk about that middle portion when you were living in Mexico-

Norma: Mhm!

Kendall: -before you moved.

Norma: Back here?

Kendall: Back here. Um, can you talk, 'cause you were older at that time-

Norma: Mhm!

Kendall: -so can you talk a little bit more about what that was like?

Norma: So, I did half elementary and half middle school, or all of middle school in Mexico. I loved it. I loved, loved living in Mexico. Um, at first it was a little bit of a culture shock being able to go there-I spoke Spanish, but I spoke very broken Spanish. So when I arrived to 4th grade they made fun of me because I didn't conjugate my verbs correctly, I talked to professors in tú instead of Usted, the formal, um, and so that whole thing. But they were also very helpful. And one thing that I noticed is everybody jokes around, everybody has nicknames. Everybody has nicknames. Um, you call your teachers by their first name, um Profesor Alfredo, Profesor Ramiro, um I made really good friends in elementary school. And cool part was my brother my sister and I all went to the same school, so it was a private, um majority of people go to private school, in Mexico. Um, and so I was in the elementary, my sister was in the middle, and my brother was in the high school. So it was nice having all of us at the same building. I'm very family-driven I don't know if you've noticed that, so for me it was like, "Yay I'm with my brother and my sister!" Um, I loved elementary, I just, I just loved the germeses and the Day of the Dead celebrations and the Day of the Teacher, and the Day of the Student-we just had so many parties. And like I remember, um, in Día del Reyes, Reyes Magos are like the Santa Claus for Mexico, so on epiphany the 3 wise men come and give you gifts. And so the next day students don't go to school-there's school, but they don't go to school, and if they do go to school they take all their toys. And so we didn't know that until I'm showing up to school the following day and everybody's with toys and there's like 5 of us in the whole elementary. And I'm like, "Where is everybody?" It's Día del Reyes, nobody comes to school! So it was like all of that sort of stuff that I was like, "Ohhh, ohhh." I learned so much about how it, things are celebrated down there, and, um, it, it, it just was always a party. It always felt like a party, and what I, like, anywhere you go you have to pay and anywhere like, you have to pay for parking, you have to pay to enter and you have to pay for everything and there's always a line and they're always so busy and there's always so many people and I mean again it's Mexico City. So everything is so busy and busy and busy and busy, but even within that I was like, "This is so much fun!" I loved it! Now I didn't have friends in my apartment complex. I lived in a gated community, it was 29 buildings and there's 7 flights per building. And 4 units per flight. So there's a bunch of people living there. And I tried making friends, didn't necessarily work out there weren't many people my age, I don't think. Um, but that

didn't matter because I had my family that I would always go visit or go see and then I had my school friends. So it wasn't, I wasn't as dependent on the neighborhood for friendships. Um, whereas in California I was. Um, there was always people over at our house, like, adults that my parents had fam-, or our family were always, always at the house. So we were always busy in something, it's different from here in that, like, we didn't do soccer and like, we didn't do all the sports sort of things. I went to dance because I went to dance in California and so my mom put me in traditional dance-traditional Mexican dance, in Mexico and I loved it. Hated the teacher but I loved the dance. Um, I did it in California too I did traditional Mexico dancing so that's why when we moved to Mexico my mom wanted me to continue it 'cause I loved it. Um, but I hated the teacher so that's why I quit it. But, um, it, it was that, and, and then when I moved into middle school, middle school were my favorite years of my education. I made the best of friends that I'm still friends with today, I, I don't know like here kids hate middle school, for me middle school was like the best part of my life! And I, I, I don't know how to explain it, I went into theater when I was in middle school and it, I just, I don't know what it was about it I don't know if it was the school or the kids or what but, not that long ago all my middle school friends had a middle school reunion-and you don't hear about that here. And, like I'm jealous, like, "Ahhh, I wish I was there! I wish I could be there when are you guys doing it? Noo I'm teaching I can't leave!" Um, so, it, I don't, I don't know what it was about that whole, all, 'cause again middle school's only 3 years, all 3 years, 7, 8, and 9, um, it was just so much fun. And it was that whole transition period, you know, you had your crushes, like it was nothing different, but, I don't know, I had, I just had great friends, and I felt very comfortable. I remember going to school every day with butterflies in my stomach, um, but I loved it. I, I loved going to school I loved, and it wasn't like I had great teachers, that wasn't it, it was the socializing part that I loved. Um, and school is very different. Like I said, no lockers, it was, um, 4 classes, A, B, C and D, like, um, instead of 7th, 8th, and 9th, it's 1, 2, and 3, so middle school 1, grade 1 had 4, middle school 2 had 4, and yeah. We all had 4 classes. And um, it was a 2-building, it was a small school, 2-floor building on each side. I don't know I just something about it I loved, we wore uniforms and we would hike up our skirts so the discipline coordinator wouldn't catch us, we would put it down and, um, we made cheat sheets and we would sew them onto our skirts. It was just fun. We had one teacher that would give us extra credit for the most creative cheat sheet. We put plays on for our English projects, and we would present them to the whole school. I don't know, just something about middle school I loved it, and that's why I didn't want to leave. Um, that's why when I moved here I was just like, 'Man, like imagine that but in high school that would've been so much fun!' Um, so it was just, it was just that whole different, a whole different experience from what middle school, and I always wonder what would it have been like to do middle school here or what would it have been like to do high school over there. Um, but I just ended up where I was meant to end up, but it was like, I'm 34 I shouldn't be like, "Ahh middle school years were the best years of my life!" But they were! (laughs) They were a lot of fun it was something about them that were just a lot of fun. Um, yeah and I made really good friends and we still are in contact today. And I'm so grateful

for them, they, they taught me how to be, and I think too they didn't know that I was from, that I lived in California, so they just kind of accepted me without calling me *la gringita* (chuckles). And in elementary school I fainted once, every Monday you do honors to the flag when they put the flag up on the flag pole, and (chuckles) I was the tallest and so I fainted and so they called me the fainting sleeping beauty. And, no, the *gringa* fainting sleeping beauty-that was my nickname. The *gringa* fainting sleeping beauty. For years. And so when I moved to middle school it was a different school and nobody knew that about me so it was good. But I don't know it was just, I loved middle school. I loved it (laughs).

Kendall: So one of my last few questions revolves around, if, do you ever think about what it would have been like if you would have stayed and grown up-

Norma: Every day. All the time.

Kendall: -where you were in Mexico, or just raising your kids in Mexico?

Norma: I think about it all the time, what would have life been like if we had stayed there. If we had stayed in California we would have experienced the earthquake of '95, what would have happened there? If we had stayed in Mexico, what would have happened? Like, I think about that all the time of what my life would have ended up, would I have gone to this high school, would I have gone to that high school, what college, would I be a teacher? Um, would I still be in the same path that I am today? I think about that, but I also think there's no point in thinking about that 'cause I wouldn't be where I am, I wouldn't have my kids I wouldn't be with my husband. Things would have been completely different in my life. Um, yeah, I do like, like I said my biggest thing is wanting to move there so that my kids can have that experience. I did not know what being Mexican meant until I moved to Mexico. And that's when I was like, 'Wow, it's all of this.' And it's, and like today I watched the news and like I hear all these things and, if I hadn't been in Mexico I wouldn't know how wrong people are about it all, you know I would've been like, "Well yeah, because the news always is portraying it in this light it must be like that!" Where I'm like, you can get robbed in Mexico as much as you can get robbed in D.C. like it's the exact same thing. Um, and my husband's always like, "Oh, but the crime down there" and I'm like, "The crime down there and the crime over here is the same, you're just hearing it scandalized here, just like they hear it scandalized from over here." Like it's just, like a matter of your point of view. Um, when he went to Mexico for the first time he was very like, nervous and scared and like, "Oh my gosh!" And I was like, "Look this is normal, this is the everyday life, this is the normal part. This is New York City." Like it's the same thing; same hustle and bustle and same sort of stuff. And one thing that he observed and he's like, "Even the poor people here are still smiling and happy", and I was like, "Yeah, 'cause you have your family." I'd rather be poor in Mexico than poor in the U.S. because you have very little support systems here than you do over there. Um, which is weird to say, but I would love for my kids to be able to be there because they need to know where they come from. The other day we were watching *Coco* [an animated

children's movie] and I put it in Spanish, 'cause I like the music more in Spanish, and my daughter's like, "Mama, put it back in our language!" And that broke my heart, I was like, "Baby girl Spanish is your language, Spanish is what we speak!" And she's like, "No mama, they speak funny" and like all those sort of things and I was like, "No, don't learn this little girl!" And so that, that's what drives me to want to go to Mexico, for them. And when we were there for the wedding not that long ago, she, she was starting to pick up on it, and was starting to speak it a little more-everybody wanted to speak English to her and I was like, "No! Speak to her in Spanish, please!" Um, and so I just, I just want her to know where she's from, both of them I want them to know where they're from. I want them to know the roots of everything. Just like, and I just want them to be proud of it. Um, and I don't feel like I'm doing a good enough job here than I could. Um, so hopefully my goal is to get them to go every year, for the summer at least, and then take it from there. And as long as I can take them to my parent's so that they can learn through my parents, and, just, take it that way. Because it's not easy, it's it's really hard to try to influence, and I'm first-generation, my husband doesn't speak Spanish, he refused to learn from his parents, and like that's my biggest fear, that my kids will refuse. "Don't, please don't, you don't know the advantage of your future!" And, just in general, just remembering where you're from is so important. It's just, it's so important.

Kendall: So, to conclude, is there anything else that you would like to add that you want to include, be able to include about your story?

Norma: Um, I don't, I think just, I'm blessed to live in, where I live. We have so many people from so many different places, and I had never met a Salvadorian before in my life, I had never met a Honduran before in my life, and now being here in Montgomery County and teaching in Montgomery County, I'm exposed to the world. And that's one of the beautiful things of this area. And I never would've experienced that if I had just stayed in Mexico. If I were in Mexico I'd only meet Mexicans. And yes, I would have loved-I still love my culture and I love my culture because of that but being here I'm able to embrace the world. And I think that's one of the beautiful things of what this area and the U.S. is all about. We have so many different pieces from everywhere here, and all we have to do is just take a moment to listen and just hear from them and appreciate it 'cause more often than not you'll find more things in common than not. We're all connected, and we all share so many things, and I think it's important to sit down and just talk to people and asking them about where they came from and their story, it's powerful.

Kendall: One last thing that made me think of that I wanted to ask you was now that you're a teacher teaching all of these diverse students, do you, what kind of teacher do you hope that you can be for your students?

Norma: (breathes in deeply) I hope I can be like Mrs. Meyers. And I've said this many times to adults that I, 'cause now my position is teaching teachers; I don't necessarily get to work individually with students. But, I don't care if they learn how to multiply fractions, and about the U.S. Constitution, I honestly don't care about that. I care

whether or not they learn that somebody loved them, and somebody is on their side, somebody believes in them, and that is their cheerleader. Everything else will fall into place, all the learning they have to have will happen, only if they know that somebody is there for them. Um, that's something I have learned about how strong relationships are, and if kids, kids can read through your B.S. in a split second, especially children who have difficult home lives. They can read through it so quickly. And they can tell whether you're genuinely caring about them or if you're just saying the right words. And so I hope that my students all know that from the bottom of my heart they're my babies and that I love them, each and every single one, even the teachers that I work with now 'cause now they're my students. That I'm on their side and I believe in them and I hope nothing but the best because I know that they're all good people, and only good things can come from them, 'cause they're amazing. Like, the, the, the kids that I have had, I've been so blessed to have so many awesome students, even my most difficult ones, have taught me and I just hope that I did the same for them. And some of them are here on this campus right now! (laughs)

Kendall: Really?

Norma: I'm a dork, yes. Some of my babies are here.

Kendall: That's nice. Okay, well that's all I have for you. So thank you very much.

Norma: You're welcome, I hope you found this helpful.

Kendall: It was very nice hearing your story. I don't know if I'm supposed to say something at the end...So, it is now 5:10 pm, and this is Kendall signing off. (both laugh)