

TRANSCRIPT- CAROLINA MASCARIN

Interviewee: CAROLINA MASCARIN

Interviewer: SYDNEY WILLIAMS

Date: April 16, 2021

Place: Charleston, SC by Zoom

Length of recording: 45 minutes

SIDNEY WILLIAMS: So my name is Sydney Williams. I'm currently a senior here at the Citadel and I am an intern with oral history department. And we're focusing right now on the Hispanic and Latinx community, namely like kind of just capturing people's stories throughout history for our program. Can you hear me okay.

CAROLINA MASCARIN: Yeah. So I'm trying to connect my AirPods, so I won't have any, let me check that. Let me check. I'm trying to connect my AirPods that way. I don't have any noise interference, but my kids are the ones who do this. So I'm struggling in doing it. I'm sorry. You know, there's a lot out there.

SW: Okay. I'm sorry. Go ahead. Okay, so I'm just gonna stay. Okay. Hi, my name is Sydney Williams. Today we will be conducting an interview with Ms. Is it Carolyn or Carolina?

CM: Carolina.

SW: Carolina. Is it Mascarin? I want to make sure I pronounce it.

CM: Mascarin.

SW: Perfect. This'll be an interview of Carolina Mascarín for the oral history department is April 16 at 9:00 AM. And would you be able just to state your name, where you were born and when.

CM: My name is Carolina Mascarín, I was born in Bogotá, Colombia and I was born on March 18, 1979.

SW: Okay. So we're just going to kind of go through chronological order. Can you kind of with your childhood on, so could you tell me a little bit about your childhood and growing up in Colombia?

CM: Well, I grew up in Bogotá, which is a capital, Bogotá that is the capital of Colombia. It's a big city. I'm the oldest of three girls. My mom, my father, they're both teachers. My family there, we have a lot of teachers you know, in our family. But I think I was influenced a lot in my artistic level by my uncle, who is my, also my godfather. He is a painter and graphic designer and a photographer. And he used to paint, he used to take pictures and I remember as a little girl that on my grandparents' house, they build kind of like a studio, a developing a studio in the back of their house. And I remember going in there and just be fascinated about, all the work that he would, he would do. And I don't know, I loved growing up in Colombia. We used to have a house in two cities outside of Bogotá where, we used to spend our summers and, I always love being outside in nature. So, that's one of the things that I enjoyed the most. So when I get, I got into Charleston, that's why I think I, I got so linked to the city because I love Bogotá, but I loved the tranquility of Charleston compared to Bogotá.

SW: Can you recall your first time, I guess working with photography?

CM: My first time working with photography. I always liked to take pictures. I didn't know what it was, but I remember in high school we had an art history teacher who had had this exercise and she would pair two students and one would be the camera and the other one would be the photographer. And when I was the camera, you were supposed to open your eyes and capture with your eyes and they'd paint, whatever you saw. So I think that was kinda like my first connection with photography. Sometimes you don't see the—you see the world differently with a camera. So I think that was my first connection. And then later in college I studied journalism. You see every semester photography and I learned photography with a film photography. So I learned how to develop and all the process. So I think my first connection was in high school, but then when I got my first camera in college around 2000, no, it was around 1997 that was when I started like falling in love with art.

SW: And where did we go to college?

CM: I went to Bogotá I went to two colleges, one is La Sabana. And then I went to Los Libertadores, I finished there.

SW: And you said you were getting a degree in journalism,

CM: Mass media and journalism.

SW: And during that time, did you ever, you know have any difficulties like with not necessarily, did you ever, like think about turning back from your degree or were you

always super committed to it? Did you know that was something that you had always been really passionate about?

CM: I was. Well, my dad was a teacher, but while we were growing up, he went to school, went back to school and he went back to become a journalist and he would take us to the newsroom and I fall in love with the art of journalism and just capturing life stories. So I was really committed to it. I was really committed to it. I made a lap, on the years between the two colleges that I went to. But, when I went back, I really liked, I really liked journalism. It is a really, it has a lot of fields that you can perform, in journalism, I mean, radio, TV, newspaper, photography, similar way that you can communicate. So I really was committed to it and I'm still not fully as a, as a journalist, but I think, all what I learned is part of it.

SW: Is there anything that you're, that you have a preference for? Like, are you more passionate about photography or journalism in one, in one specific thing or not?

CM: Passion of what I take pictures or

SW: Right. Because we're more interested in capturing the others.

CM: Oh really, you know what I like, I really like to capture, the real moment. Oh, usually when you're a photographer, people expect to you to pose them and take pretty pictures of themselves. I do that, but I love to capture the moments when I go to a wedding or a family session or those, those unscripted moments, the ones that I love to, to capture.

SW: So could you talk a little bit about your time in moving to the United States?

CM: Sure. So when I graduated from college, I found this program that you can-- a student exchange. I went to New Hampshire and I was there for about six months. It was a good experience, but then I got a job offer here in South Carolina working in a TV channel. Azteca America TV channel. It is not here anymore. And then so I moved down to South Carolina. I met my husband and that's it. He was working on the Spanish TV radio station as a salesperson. And I was working as a journalist as a reporter. And that's the end of the story. I ended up—I was lucky enough to find—I don't think I found Charleston. In Colombia, I don't think Charleston is one of the well-known cities. When I used to say, I, you didn't know where it was, so I didn't know about it, but I was lucky enough that Charleston found me in a certain way. And then when I moved here. I was in love of the city. Well, there's a lot of two level what it's. So, yes. So I met my husband here and that's the end of the story.

SW: So when you were growing up and even when you were in college, did you ever intend to end up living in the United States or even staying here more permanently?

CM: Yes, always. I, we used to come, I've been coming to the States since I was nine years old. We have family, so vacations and trips, but I always found myself more drawn to be outside of the country. I love Colombia, but for some reason I knew that my life would be ended up being outside of the country. And the United States was telling me, focus on where I wanted to be.

SW: Can you talk a little bit about like, your experience when you did move to the United States? Did you have any like what were the positive and negative experiences that you faced when you did move here?

CM: The positive experiences that well, English, I was able to practice my English. Working opportunities. I think all that came with it. I haven't found negativity, negative experiences, I think is more, you have to adapt culturally to the country. Which I think it's normal for any, for everybody. It's not a negative experience, but it's also like more adapt, you have to adapt to the country in order for you to be able to perform well. I faced some, I don't say discrimination, but I think, I think it, I don't think it's discrimination, but I think it is more ignorance. People sometimes they know that they are being discriminating and they— I don't think they do it in a, in a, in a mean way. But sometimes when they, people used to ask me, because I used to speak Spanish to my kids and my kids are really fair- they would ask me if I was their nanny or if I was their maid, which I was in a certain way (laughs). I am always, but just because of, of that, I think those are the only reasons. Maybe also struggling with your visa, your immigration status any immigrant who comes to the states has to face that. So it is also kind of like a burden, when you moving here, do you have to find your way on how you're going to stay. Thankfully, I married my husband and it was an easier path for me. But while I was in New Hampshire and then I got offered the job here. That was a struggle - if I'm going to stay here if the visa is going to be allowed if I'm going to be granted. So those are struggles that any immigrant faces. That's one of the, maybe. I don't recall that time when I was doing that, really it was a year in which I was going back and forth with that. So it was really painful, but thank God I'm here now. And the country allow me to stay,

SW: So when you joined the meeting today your name came up as Charleston Urban League. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

CM: Yes. So it's my, so in 2009, I joined, I started working with the Charleston Urban League, which is a nonprofit. And I that's, this is the, obviously the account of my of my job now, we're, I'm working part-time, but it's a nonprofit it's an African-American nonprofit. And for the past ten, well, more than that, don't know, ten, twelve years I have being working there as a fair housing and housing counselor, I deal with a lot of discrimination cases, housing discrimination cases. And we also try to counsel people when they're going to buy a house, or if they have lender, tenant issues or housing discrimination issues. That's what I do.

SW: And since you've been doing that is there, have you found issues with like the system that you, you have an idea of how you can, or how, I guess the United States could better receive people and better provide fair housing. Like, what are ways that we could go around with this issue and make it better for people,

CM: Some of these countries that have these, you have these laws, the fair housing laws. There are many countries who are not, residents are not protected under the fair housing laws, or they don't even have a law about that. So I love about that in this country. What can we do better? I think education is basic and important. Many of the housing discrimination cases that we faced are because of ignorance of either the landlord or the property owner. They don't know what they're doing. When they discriminate against, there are certain protected classes and the ones that we see more housing discrimination complaints from are from national origin, which are immigrants who are

discriminated in a certain way. They don't fix their things, or didn't allow to live in the place and then race and disabilities. Those are the three main housing discrimination cases that we have disabled residents and agents, and they in the city who they don't get granted some of their benefits because they just are not aware of them. And I think, again, it's because of ignorance. Race is another one of the ones that discrimination pieces that we see them most. And education, I think education, not only to landlords, not only to property owners, but also to tenants, to home buyers. It is important to residents in the area to know what their rights are. We see that as residents, we didn't know what the law protect you from, but also what your rights and responsibilities are.

SW: Okay. Thank you. So when you, when you went to the United States, did you ever imagine yourself having your own business. Because I know you said you came and you were working for the news channel that, and so through that process, did you ever imagine having your own business and doing something like that?

CM: Not to be honest, I was not expecting that I was going to end up doing this. I started this with my dad, before I got married. And I think it was more, I see a lot of that in, in many Latinos and immigrants who come to the country and they don't find many opportunities finding like a nine to five job or they apply. We are forced in a certain way to create our own business. And many of us are successful. Others are not, but I never imagined that. And we're so blessed that this country is so, so welcoming on open your small business on people accepting you with open arms on, on how they can help you to grow your business. So, yes, I never thought about it, but here I am. And I'm glad to be in this country that allow me to, to growth in this, in this path.

SW: So your dad helped you start this business. Do your parents also live in the United States?

CM: My parents live in the United States. My dad, he, well, I used to work in a TV channel. My dad got a job offer and my dad moved first. My mom is a teacher or she was a teacher at a time and she was going back and forth because she was allowed to retire. I finally, when she retired to move on to the United States, so I'm lucky enough to have my, both, both of my parents here in the United States. And I'm really blessed about that.

SW: When you were starting your business, did you ever find, like during the process, did you find a lot of difficulties or was it was the process easy or can you explain a little bit more about that?

CM: It was, it was an easy process. I would say. When we started the business, my dad and I, my daddy is a TV producer and with my photography skills, we thought we could offer these to the community. And we, when we opened de LOC, we found somebody who helped us with that, then, you know, a lawyer, accountant, all that, and they explained the process. So yes, it was really it was easy in a certain way is just having all your everything organized in order for you to get it done.

SW: And you said that you have children. Can you talk a little bit about them and then also what it's like juggling being a business woman and also having children and being a mom?

CM: Sure. So my husband and I, we have three boys. Our oldest he's today, sixteen years old, our middle guy's, thirteen years old and we have a five-year-old, so there are three boys, my Jacob and Lucas in their first, I would say nine years of my life, I was only doing a part-time on my business and I was working full time. And then for the past three years on the dynamic last year, well also after my five-year-old was born. I started doing these, my business full-time. I think you have, when you have your own business, you have to treat it like a, you're working for somebody. You have to have a schedule, you have to be organized with your time. You have to allow time for business and for family. And that's something that I have learned.

Sometimes we get so consumed on doing the best on, on our work, on our business, on making money that we don't allow our families to- it is not that we don't allow, but we forget about our family. So one thing that I've learned is that as a business woman, as a mother, as a wife, I have to set up a schedule. And I'm working from home, so sometimes it's hard, but from one time to my time that from a certain hours, I'm all on my business and then my family. And then, you know, it's, it's, it's important for you to be organized with your time on your schedule.

SW: Thank you. So could you tell us a little bit about how you heard about the Ecos project like this? Yes. And then a little bit also about how you got involved with that.

CM: So Marina Laura [Lopez]. I've been involved with the community for a while. More like more when, while I was working with a nonprofit and Marina Laura and Ivan Segura they said that these would be a great project. How did I get engaged. I got

the invitation I jumped in right away. It's a beautiful project. Many of the stories there are--when I'd see myself as an immigrant, I don't think I have had the same struggles and the same tenacity that some of these women - because I had a woman- but some of these immigrants have had to face. So I was honored to be able to portray these, but I was so humbled by their experience. I'm an immigrant and I've been lucky enough not to face whatever they have faced. Some of them have faced many things and I admired them to be honest. I am humbled by their life and also how they have chosen that, you know, that disadvantages or the obstacles can not lead you just, close your life. Yeah. It was a beautiful project and I'm glad that I was able to be part of it.

SW: So I am curious how you actually gotten involved with the Fair Housing Alliance, like how that came up in your life and how you, how you got interested in invested in that. I know you said you've been working with them since 2009, correct? Yep. So how did that begin?

CM: Well, during the recession, the TV station cut my job and I was looking for a job. I saw they Charleston Urban League posting. I was interviewed, and then I got involved. And then obviously they have some training and I was, I actually, I'm really lucky to be involved with these. I didn't know anything about fair housing or the housing rights or lender tenant or housing discrimination or landlord tenant rights. I was never aware of that until I started working on this job. And I'm glad that I started working here because I have not only learned about housing discrimination, but also a lot of issues that the African-Americans, one a the minorities (sound gap) Urban League job. This is an agency that has been at least a hundred years in the United States, we have, we have

different offices around the country and our, our agency is one of the smallest ones in the country. But I've learned a lot about civil rights about equality, about discrimination, unfortunately, but it's been an eye opening experience for me.

SW: And I'm sure through that experience, you've met a lot of really interesting community members.

CM: Yes, I was. Oh yeah. I have, I met many people who (00:24:53) to my life. Right.

SW: And that's honestly amazing. Can you talk about how you met your husband?

CM: Yes. We met at the Spanish radio station, TV station. He was in sales and one day well we didn't, we were just coworkers. We didn't like each other, but he ended up inviting me to a party. And since that day we've been together, it's been seventeen years already. So yeah, my husband actually he's Canadian, but he grew up in Michigan. He's from all over. He, his dad used to work for Ford, so he's being in California and Michigan, but also he was in a period of time in Mexico. So he speaks in Spanish. So he tried to speak Spanish. So we try to have Spanish home-based. So we try to speak as much Spanish as we can at home. He believes that he's Mexican, although he's blue eyed, blond. But I tell him that we speak Colombian Spanish at home.

SW: What are ways that your husband supports you so that you're able to you know, be a full-time mom and also be a business owner at the same time?

CM: He, you know, Jamie, he understands that my job has an odd schedule. I work mostly on the weekends, so mainly Fridays and Saturdays. So during the weekdays, I'm with the boys. On the weekends, he's with the boys. And well, now we both are working from home. He, we try to respect work schedule and workspaces. So that's how he supports me. And also he encourages me sometimes to do new things, and sometimes he helps me holding the flashes or -- he's really supportive and really an amazing guy.

SW: So now, like living in the United States, are there times where you're able to go travel back to Colombia and take your children back there and get to kind of share, I guess, your roots with your family.

CM: Yes. Yes. We've been in a few weddings. We've been in Bogotá. We were planning to go last year because my five-year-old hasn't been in my city. So hopefully this year or next year when we're allowed to go back. I think is really important for us to offer, for them to know about my roots, because those are part of them. They are Colombian and they say they're Colombian. So it's important for them also to, to know where I'm coming from, because that's part of their, of their heritage.

SW: Do you think that you would have been able to still have the same successful business that you do if you were still living in Colombia?

CM: Honestly? Well, it's hard to tell, but I don't think so. Colombia, Colombia is a country that you have to be really well connected in order for you to succeed. I think that was part of my eagerness to leave the country because I knew that it would be harder for me to succeed in Colombia or to become what I want it to be in Colombia, if I were to

stay there. It's really competitive. It is really still really man centered. I don't know how to say it. So, yeah, I don't think I would've had the same success that I have here.

SW: And since you've had the opportunity to live in two countries for large portions of your life we talked a lot about kind of the, the difficulties here in the United States facing discrimination and immigrants and things of that nature. Would you say that it's equally a problem in Colombia or how, how does that look in Colombia? In terms of discrimination for people in Colombia?

CM: Well, lately I don't know if you are or you have heard, seen the news Venezuela is having a hard time. And a lot of immigrants from Venezuela are traveling from Venezuela to Colombia and they are moving to main cities. My family says, and that's based on their experience. And also, and we see on the news that Venezuelan immigrants are facing discrimination from Colombia immigrants from Colombia residents. Obviously, the situations from both countries, the United States and Colombia are totally different. Colombia is a country that doesn't have the same resources as the United States. And we have a lot of disadvantaged people in Colombia. So when other immigrants come in and then they fight for the same things and we have a country who's not helping the poor, their own poor, and then more people getting then, do you see more discrimination.

So, unfortunately the last two years, we have seen more complaints that were discrimination against Venezuelans, but also more violence. So it's sad. And also, you know, the histories, but history that we have over our countries is written by some, some we don't have the full history of what our countries are. Colombia had a lot of, we had a

lot of slavery in our country because that's where a lot of the slaves came from, or they came in through Colombia. And even though that we didn't see that and in our history books is not, documented. Now we see that the coast, which are the country, the cities where we have more, Afro Colombian people, especially one department or one state called Choco is one of the ones who have the majority of African-American people. But we see discrimination on opportunities is one of the most richest states or departments in the country, because it has a lot of resources, but also the poorness is, and the way that the residents are treated, their own residents are treated. They don't have water, they don't have electricity and we're in the 21st century. So that's when I see that, yes, we see discrimination in many ways, in our country, still with immigrants, but also with our own, unfortunately,

SW: Due to COVID in Colombia, have they experienced more people being displaced or what, what's the experience like in Colombia as a result of this pandemic?

CM: I think that, well, Bogotá. I'm going to talk a little bit about Bogotá, because that's where my, my family's from. And that's where we get their reports from. The mayor of Bogotá is a woman. She has been, we have to, we have to give her a lot of credit. Yes, the cities businesses have been closed. Yes, a lot of economic damage has been done to the city, but also we, as a cities in Bogotá at least, I don't know the number now, but it's, I would say seventy million resident has not had as many cases of COVID as compared to South Carolina. And I remember what Colombia was not having as many cases as South Carolina , was having more cases than my whole country. So Colombia has had a good manage of the pandemic, but the economic reasons have forced people to go out and, and

work because we don't get assistance. As some of the people there, they have to work. They're forced to work when they didn't work, they're affected, they cannot eat. So, but, the economy yes. Has affected the country economically, but hopefully--

SW: And also in terms of COVID, was your business affected at all by that?

CM: Yes. We had, we usually do like around twenty to twenty two weddings or events during the year. There were some of them canceled. Some of them were postponed, so yes, it was affected. Then now these years we see a lot of changes because a lot of things are still closed and our businesses were more like a luxury. If you think about it, it's a luxury. So people are being really cautious about spending money because the necessities are more important, like house food. So yes, we've been affected, we've seen a little recovery so we cannot complain. Nothing has, we have had everything so far. We cannot complain as long as we're healthy.

SW: And you said you're currently working from home. How was that paired with your children being home and doing online learning?

CM: Oh, my. We've been adapting to it. The first months, no, well, March 15 was when everything was, everything was closed. So those four, the last two months of school where I thought I was going to go nuts. But, I think, after the summer we got ready and we try to make it the best experience for all of us, because we're going to feel in the same house trying to try to survive. So, but yeah, my at least my little guy, my five year old, he's going to school now, so he makes things a lot easier.

SW: That's great. Are there ever times where your, where your children ever actually assist you with your work?

CM: Yes, actually my two older guys they go and help me holding flashes when they have an event or holding bags, they helped my dad to pull any camera. So yes, they, they have been working with us for a while.

SW: And have any of them shown any interest in potentially pursuing this as well? I know they're still really young. But have any of them kind of showed interest in it?

CM: Not really. A they're still, they're still too young. I think it just sees this money-making machine.

SW: And could you walk me through a day in your life kind of pre COVID, what it would look like, you know, waking up even getting your kids to school and then mixing work and stuff like that. Just a general idea.

CM: Before and after.

SW: Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

CM: So I would get up, get the kids ready, breakfast, school, and then I will have a set time to work because I have worked for the past two years from home on my photography. And, and then also I would go to the office for my part-time job. And then we would get home dinner, sports. We have three busy boys, then, home, and then bed. With COVID everything drastically changed. Everything was at home. We would get up.

I'm really, I'm not, I'm not going to say that I'm really pragmatic, but I've tried to have, I set a schedule for things, and I thought it was going to work. And I would write a schedule the times that they were supposed to be doing something and that I was supposed to be doing something.

So being at home has changed my perspective of life. I have learned to be more flexible. So we would get in--during COVID, we would get up, get ready have family time is pretty much, you have to adapt to whatever they use. Now we have, I have learned that I cannot plan ahead, with too much time. And the boys are set on their schedule. We'll have a lot of time together. So I think that was the good part of it. We did a lot of puzzles, a lot of board games. So I think COVID has brought us closer as a family. I can, I can assure that.

SW: Awesome. And now that things are kind of opening up a little bit more, have you seen of your work pick up a little bit more in the recent months?

CM: It has it has, we are doing at least one event a month, which is better and yes, it's picking up slowly, but I'm confident that he's going to be better with time, it's going to get better with time.

SW: Is there anything that you would like to just share in general or anything that you feel like I might not have asked you that you feel is important for the interview?

CM: No, not that I can think of. I can only say that I've seen this country--well, as an immigrant. It's hard for you to identify yourself. There's a song that is, I think he's, he's Argentinian and he says, "no soy de aqui ni soy de alla" "I'm not from here and I'm not

from there”. So when I go back to Colombia, I don't feel fully Colombian, but I'm, I'm here. I'm not fully American. So I've have had a hard time to, I think, define myself on who I am as an immigrant. I think that's one of the struggles that I have had because I don't find myself setting any in one place. And I'm just grateful. I'm grateful that I was able to have this opportunity of being in these country. Not many people have this, the chance of living in this country have the chances that I have is such a welcoming country.

Yes, it has mistakes, but we cannot, we cannot pretend that everything's going to be pretty or that everything is going to be perfect. But I think this country has so many positives that you've raised most of the negativities that these type of interviews and these type of programs where they do is just eye opening are educate people about lives of others and not only see ourselves. And that's the thing, that's one of the issues that the country, or some, some people in this country have the daily see themselves, but they don't see others, different, I think that's that's one of the things that I would like to say. Yeah.

SW: Thank you so much for sharing such a personal I guess feeling that you have, an experience that you have. I really appreciated you taking time out of your day and how busy you are. Just sitting down and talking to me especially early in the morning. I know you have to, you have a busy schedule. And I, this is kind of the end of the interviews. It's just very informal. I just kinda wanted to get a good sense of who you are and your experiences. I'm going to get out of school. We appreciate you taking that time to speak with me, and it was such a pleasure meeting with you today. Do you have any questions for me before I let you go and enjoy the rest of your day, your son's birthday?

CM: Well, no, thank you first. Thank you for your time. And, for including me on this. How far are you in school?

SW: I am going to graduate in two weeks.

CM: Oh, wow. Congratulations. And you speak Spanish, right?

SW: A little bit, yes.

CM: Congratulations. I was curious of all the best you're a senior.

SW: Yes, ma'am. I studied political science and Spanish.

CM: Oh, wow. Good. Good, good, good. Well my son, he's looking for schools. Would you recommend the Citadel for school, for boys? We are.

SW: It's a very, it's a very unique environment. I think it's something that it's definitely not for everyone, but I think I recommend coming and just seeing it, even when he's, you know, you said, you said he's 16. Right?

CM: Yes he is a sophomore.

SW: Right. Even being 16. I mean, coming on campus and just getting, like, seeing the things, because it's such a unique thing just to see and all the little weird oddities that go on here. I think this is a really great place. And it offers a very unique learning experience where the classes are really small because we're a small college. There's only about 2300 of us. Like actually go to school here. The lifestyle is pretty

mentally and physically challenging. I will say so it's not for everyone, but it can be for anyone who wants to put in the effort to make it happen. Good.

CM: I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to hear that because he's already exploring the schools. So does these one will be one and you're from, are you from here or where are you from?

SW: I am from Houston.

CM: Oh, okay. Okay. Okay, cool. Cool. Good. Okay. I'm so glad to meet you. And, thank you so much for your time.

SW: Absolutely. It was a pleasure. Have a great day.

CM: You too. Congratulations again on your graduation.

END OF THE RECORDING

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