

**00:00:00 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

As you know, this is an oral history project where we'll sort of speak about your experience as an immigrant coming to the United States. Would you like to introduce yourself before we begin?

**00:00:11 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Sure. My name is Miguel Cruz and I immigrated from Mexico to the US at the age of 5.

**00:00:19 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Okay. So how was your life in Mexico?

**00:00:21 – 00:00:28 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

I don't really remember it since I was 5. The only thing I remember is going to school and then everything after that is the US.

**00:00:30 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Okay, well from what you have...kind of remember, are there any memories that you kind of hold or treasure?

**00:00:39 – 00:00:50 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Probably, just being at school because it was different than school in the US. But I remember in Mexico is there being people that sell snacks by the school, and we would get snacks by the school.

**00:00:55 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Oh, that sounds fun.

**00:00:58 – 00:00:59 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

And what was it like arriving in the United States?

**00:01:02 – 00:01:16 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Um...it was interesting. I don't really remember it since I was five. We were six actually at that point already. Um...but yeah, I don't really remember, I just know that we thought it was a fun trip.

**00:01:18 – 00:01:20 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Ok. and did you face any difficulties adapting to a new culture?

**00:01:23 – 00:01:42 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Oh yeah, I spoke no English. I did not know the American food specifically in the public school system. So, when I got here, we went into first grade. And... yeah, everything was new, the

language was new, the people were new, people looked way different than what I was used to, and the food was new. So it was, yeah, adjusting to everything all at once.

**00:01:45 – 00:01:47 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Oh, wow, that that must have been hard.

**00:01:49 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

And well, what has been your experience attending school as someone who's undocumented?

**00:01:56 – 00:02:20 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Uhm. I didn't know until high school when I was in junior year, preparing to apply for schools. I realized then that I didn't...I couldn't get the...I couldn't apply to certain scholarships because I didn't have the right status to get specific scholarships, so it was very difficult to imagine myself going to school without the proper status.

**00:02:23 – 00:02:28 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Oh, I see. And do you have a specific story that maybe you would feel comfortable sharing about that experience.

**00:02:32 – 00:02:52 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, I remember applying to Rutgers along with everybody else at my school, and I was actually the first one to get accepted and everybody was shocked. But it was short lived because I couldn't really...after realizing that I got in, I couldn't make it a reality because I wouldn't be able to afford it, and all the scholarships at that time required status, which I didn't have.

**00:03:01 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

So, it was a very difficult time for you.

**00:03:03 – 00:03:07 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, it was realizing I got into school like everybody else, yet I couldn't attend.

**00:03:12 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

And now, as a DACA recipient, what was your experience now finishing up high school and now transitioning to college?

**00:03:18 – 00:03:53 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yes, so once Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was approved...or made into law...or actually it was an executive order by President...by then President Obama, I wasn't able to work. At that time, I was already outside of high school, it was freshman year of college. I attended Middlesex, since I couldn't go to Rutgers. But then I dropped out because I wanted to work so I

could save money. So, I did...yeah, I did a semester at Middlesex for about...yeah, for one semester I was doing biology. Then I dropped out, so I could go to work.

**00:03:54 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Okay, and during that time that you spent, during that semester, were there any difficulties that you faced?

**00:04:03 – 00:04:21 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Probably not having a car. And having to commute from New Brunswick to Middlesex. And... yeah, having to wait for the bus, having to get up early, and... yeah, it's just...it was hard to be independent without having...being mobile.

**00:04:25 – 00:04:31 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Yeah, and I can...as someone who's done a bit of commuting, I think it's been like around 40 minutes that you spend on the bus, right, coming and going every day?

**00:04:34 – 00:04:55 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, and that really limited my ability to do anything else, because there were classes that were in the morning and then some in the afternoon. So, I couldn't really leave campus to go to another job, so that's why I ended up dropping out, because the job I did get required me to be in the office by 12:00, so I could only do morning classes.

**00:04:57 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Oh, I see. And these difficulties that you're saying you faced, how...do you think they were maybe heightened by any chance by your immigration status?

**00:05:05 – 00:05:19 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah...I mean I... You know, at this point, I didn't have money to buy a car. I couldn't even get a car because of status. I didn't have status. And once I had temporary status, then I didn't have...I still didn't have a good job, so I had...I got the only job I could get at that point in order to save for a car.

**00:05:30 – 00:05:33 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

I see. Now, as you're hoping to obtain a higher education, what was your goal? What were you trying to accomplish?

**00:05:41 – 00:06:08 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

You know, ultimately. I went back on knowing that I wanted to get a bachelor's degree no matter what. So, you know, once I... Once I started earning money and saving, I was able to jump from one job to another that...which allowed me to earn more income and ultimately get a car. Um...

And little by little, I decided to go back to school since I had to drop out to...to go to...to go to work. And it took me 10 years since I graduated from high school to get my bachelor's degree in human resources, but I finally did it, which was really amazing.

**00:06:23 – 00:06:27 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

That's an impressive feat, especially with all the hard work you did. Now, do you think you could describe your experience in college, both at Middlesex College and Rutgers University?

**00:06:32 – 00:07:23 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, so my experience at Middlesex was very limited, mainly because, you know it's a very commuter school, smaller, and you know, they offered some activities but not...not many that I could attend based on work and other responsibilities. Compared to Rutgers, you know, I attended Rutgers when I was...I was much older, I had a car, and I was able to do other activities there like joining the volleyball team... or the volleyball club team...participating in just different events that they have for commuter students, and then just networking in general. So, it was an interesting...yeah, it was a very different experience than at Middlesex.

**00:07:24 – 00:07:29 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

So, would you say your experience at Rutgers helped you connect, make more connections than at Middlesex?

**00:07:29 – 00:07:46 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

I... I wouldn't say help me make more connections, but it did allow me to have an experience with more people that were more diverse, that we're looking to do different things, that I was able to learn from as well.

**00:07:49 – 00:08:03 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Okay then. That's interesting. And now we're going to go back a little bit in time to 2017. This is when the Trump administration announced the phasing out of the DACA program, and since then, there's been a lot of debate on the continuation of the DACA program. So now, what are your thoughts on the issue?

**00:08:05 – 00:08:44 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Um...I think, you know, from a biased perspective, I do hope that it stays, and it doesn't get removed. And I think that it's done a lot of good, not only for me, but a lot of people in general. You know, there's an estimated 850,000 DACA recipients in the US, which is a crazy amount of people who hold jobs, about 90% of the DACA recipients hold a job. That means if the program was to be removed, you know some...um...you know, some 2 to 3 thousand people would lose their job every day. And that's not only an impact on them, but that's also an impact on the

economy as a whole. So, I think the DACA program not only has given people opportunity but has also helped the economy in many ways.

**00:08:56 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Thank you for your input. Now you're...you're stating your opinion now looking at it as a perspective overall, but now personally have your fears been accentuated in any way?

**00:09:09 - 00:09:34 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

You know, sometimes they do. I try not to think about it. Definitely when there are political individuals who...um...talk about removing a program that is a livelihood for not only me, but many in the country, it's definitely scary to think about, of what's going to happen next if it gets removed, but yeah, I try not to think about it.

**00:09:37 – 00:10:02 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

And I think that's...I think it's a very good thing that you try to kind of maintain a positive attitude towards it. And now, going back to, you know, your immigration status, as we were speaking the...oftentimes people might take their ability to obtain a job or to buy a home for granted. Now, as someone who is both an immigrant and a DACA recipient, what would you say your experience was?

**00:10:05 – 00:10:38 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

It was definitely just more on the not having the not having the income...yeah, not being able to get a job to get the income to buy a car or a house and then also just limitation on different programs that help individuals get a home. So, it took me a lot of work, both just in terms of hours and then also in terms of just doing my own research, putting myself out there to be able to afford a car and then ultimately get a house for myself.

**00:10:40 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

So, would you say it was much more difficult in your...from your experience?

**00:10:45 – 00:11:12 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah...you know a lot of...a lot of the times for...you know, for most American...um...20-year-olds, they usually have families, who are not immigrant families, who are able to provide them with some sort of financial support to get a home, whether that's helping them with the down payment or helping them out with closing costs. I had none of that help, so all of it I had to do on my own.

**00:11:14 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

So, it's more of an independent battle, would you say?

**00:11:16 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yes.

**00:11:17 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Okay, and um...moving forward, what do you hope to accomplish?

**00:11:22 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, you know, I think long term, my goals are definitely to go back to school and get my MBA...um...and ultimately, someday hopefully be Chief People Officer at a big enterprise company.

**00:11:37 – 00:11:45 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Those are very nice goals and I'm sure you're gonna have to work a lot to get to them, but you seem to have done very well in the past. Now, what would you like people to know about DACA recipients?

**00:11:50 – 00:12:14 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Um...that DACA recipients are people that had to go through a process to get...to get approval to begin with., so they are people who have to have clean records, people who are pursuing education or pursuing a career. So DACA recipients are some of the most notable, most role model like citizens this country has...um and that they should not be taken for...taken for granted.

**00:12:27 – 00:12:36 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Thank you for...thank you for that. And you're right DACA recipients have done a lot and you're a prime example of that. And do you have any words for DACA recipients that might be living in fear with everything going on?

**00:12:41 – 00:12:48 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Yeah, I think the only advice I could give them is that they should do what feels right for them. And that, you know, it's ok to be selfish sometimes and stick to the shadows, if that's what makes the most sense to them. Ultimately, everybody has a livelihood that they need to maintain, and they need to do it in the best way that is beneficial for them and their families.

**00:13:06 – 00:13:11 Evelin Ponce (Interviewer)**

Thank you so much for the time you spent with this interview, and that concludes it. Thank you.

**00:13:11 Miguel Cruz (Interviewee)**

Thank you.