Journey of Three

By Victoria Monsivaiz

These words have never seemed more true for my mother, sister and I like they did then, as they do now. Through tremendous reflection on where we’ve been, what we’ve done and pondering what we still have yet to accomplish, it all seems unreal.

Throughout our journey together and individually thus far, I’m confident to say that we couldn’t be more proud of ourselves and each other.

Ever so grateful to know that we have had each other’s backs since day one, and will do so until our last breath on this earth. The three of us against the world.

My mother raised my sister and I in Hanford, California, and we each learned and grew to be independent and resourceful women; commuting and living in various places throughout the Central Valley, the country, and the world.

While my sister and I were attending Simas Elementary in Hanford, my mother was commuting to Fresno State double majoring in History and Chicano/a/x and Latin American Studies, all while raising two daughters by herself.

At times it was difficult to acquire a sitter, or have an efficient and dependable schedule throughout each school year, but with the helpful aid of the after school ready program and close family friends who drove my sister and I to and from school, we were all able to focus a little bit more on our academic pursuits.

On the occasions when no one could watch over my sister and I, we would accompany my mother to her lectures, library visits and group study sessions at Fresno State.

For me it felt like an entirely different world being on the campus; everything spurring possibilities and opportunities to learn, be involved and grow.

Little did I know that one day I would make the campus my home.

As years passed, moving became a routine of ours after every couple years or so. Reasons being either due to lack of financial affordability or to remain within the school district, which sometimes required us to maintain a strict financial budget in order to remain living within the school district to pay for rent, utilities and other necessities.

I to and from school, we were all able to focus a little bit more on our academic pursuits.

Throughout our journey together, the three of us believed we could make it! You’re going to make it! You’re going to get work outside the fields,” he said.

“Amor adentro. Self-love is the answer.”

“Amor Propio, Self-Love is the Answer

By Liliana Lopez

Patricia D. López, Ph.D. is the Assistant Professor for the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Kremen School of Education and Human Development. She is the Director for Enseñamos en El Valle Central. Higher Education was not her childhood focus.

As a “kid from the barrio,” born and raised in Visalia, she was strongly moved when her older sister had to leave home to attend the University of California, Davis.

Family is very important to her and after her sister graduated, Dr. López knew her journey was just beginning.

“I knew she deserved to be there,” Dr. López said.

“I remember telling her, you’re going to make it! You’re going to do this.”

Having the right counselors and mentors made the difference in her journey with higher education, says Dr. López.

Now as a professor, she looks back and sees herself and her sister in her students.

Dr. López credits her Chicana community college counselor who helped her obtain a scholarship to UC Santa Cruz.

“Fresno State, it is a first-generation, working-class background, immigrant from the valley community,” Dr. López said.

She obtained her bachelor and minor degrees in Social Psychology and Latina and Latin American Studies.

As a first-generation graduate, she admits she was not prepared and learned during her journey the ins and outs of higher education.

“It was very important to me, Laura ( Alamillio) trusted me completely and I knew as a product of the community I was a comfort for our people,” she said.

Her journey with Fresno State began in the fall of 2018.

Shortly after, she was asked to lead a grant focused on cultivating future bilingual teachers of the Latinx community.

Dr. López credits Laura Alamillio, who not only trusted her completely but was also a support in her journey with Fresno State.

Dr. López has the experience, compassion, and a strong commitment for excelling which ran in her family.

“My father was the youngest of 10, he was the one who was able to get work outside the fields,” he said.

“He worked for the City of Visalia. He was in traffic safety. To honor my doctorate, my dad made me a sign as a tribute. That was his last project.”

Dr. López makes her family, community and students proud.

She understands that students today face new generational struggles.

She knows that students today are working while going to school and the struggles that come with that.

When I asked Dr. Patricia D. López what advice she would give to Chicana students who are breaking generational barriers towards higher education she says, “Amor adentro. Self-love is the answer.”
The Face of Perseverance

By Liliana Lopez

Irán Barrera, Ph.D., LCSW is a proud Chicano. Raised by Texan farm migrant parents and born in Santa Maria in 1974. He was raised in Avenal, Kings County. He is a Social Work Professor for California State University, Fresno, a father, husband, and a man who does not allow challenges to deter him. Growing up he worked cleaning cotton and picking tomatoes. He went on to graduate from the University of Southern California (USC) majoring in Social Work.

This mindset inspired me to study abroad in Jaén, Spain for the 2019-2020 academic year during my enrollment at Fresno State; I encouraged my sister to apply and attend The Lawrenceville School boarding school in New Jersey; and my mother, leading by example, applied and accepted the position of assistant principal at Sequoia High School in Visalia.

Then as fate would have it in the spring semester of 2021, my mother graduated with her Master’s in Multicultural/Multilingual Education. My sister graduated from The Lawrenceville School with her high school diploma. I graduated with my Bachelor’s in English from Fresno State.

Again, seemingly unreal. Now presently, my sister attends the University of Southern California (USC) majoring in Environmental Civil Engineering. I currently hold two jobs, one of which is in education as a full-time tutor at Learn4Life: Kings Valley Academy II in Hanford, in addition to applying to graduate schools for Creative Writing. Last and certainly not least, my mother continues to lead, support and advocate not only for my sister and I, but for hundreds of other students who could not have asked for anyone with more strength, courage and passion to carry out this mission of being an assistant principal.

I can’t foresee our future, but I have no doubt that wherever we may go, whatever we may do, we’ll always have each other’s back.

CONTINUED JOURNEY

So from low income housing, to over priced housing, to affordable housing; for my mother moving wherever we had to move to ensure my sister and I got the best possible educational opportunities was not a matter of contemplation but a matter of “this is what’s going to happen, now how are we going to make it happen.”

No maybe, no next time. Define.

Then came a time when moving was no longer plausible, and commuting became the solution.

I attended University High School on Fresno State’s campus. My sister attended Pioneer Middle School in Hanford and my mother taught at Corcoran High School.

Three towns apart, three different schedules, three different segments of our lives.

I van pooled with eight other students from Hanford to Fresno; my sister was driven to school by my abuelos who had recently moved to California; and my mother drove and occasionally carpooled with some of her other colleagues to Corcoran.

While being together in one place is always a blessing, my mother has always taught my sister and I that there is a world away from home that is waiting to be explored.

To apply for graduate schools, and I that there is a world away from home that is waiting to be explored. And I, but for hundreds of other students who could not have asked for anyone with more strength, courage and passion to carry out the mission of being an assistant principal.

I can’t foresee our future, but I have no doubt that wherever we may go, whatever we may do, we’ll always have each other’s back.
By Victoria Monsivaiz

Student loans burden a significant number of graduates with unrealistic expectations of repayment, leaving many students in further debt and financial stress.

Overall, it makes it more difficult for post-graduates to continue their educational and professional pursuits and goals.

A monumental leap towards resolving this financial matter for more than 44 million people is by canceling student debt.

While student loan forgiveness programs such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness or Teacher Loan Forgiveness can be beneficial for many graduates, many students do not qualify for these particular forgiveness programs.

According to the Federal Student Aid government website, students are possibly eligible—not guaranteed—to qualify for these particular loan forgiveness programs.

This applies to students if and not limited to: who are employed by a not-for-profit or government organization; or by completing five consecutive academic years as a full-time teacher at a low-income elementary school, secondary school, or educational service agency.

Furthermore, in addition to the circumstances regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, many students find themselves in further financial debt than before.

Student debt accompanied with the circumstances of the pandemic has further prevented post-graduate students from starting or maintaining a business, paying medical expenses, paying living expenses, saving for retirement, and continuing to pursue higher education.

The extended pause on student loan payments due to COVID-19, will end on January 31, 2022. Even so, the extensions didn’t aid in helping to repay student debt but simply delayed impractical repayment expectations; the student debt remains.

The continuous and unrealistic expectation of repaying student debt is particularly more burdensome for students of color.

One of the post-graduate challenges that many students of color face is racial and gender discrimination in the workplace that either leaves them with no employment opportunities, unequal wages, and little to no promotion opportunities.

Therefore, the job discrimination that students of color face, contributes to the income wage gap that leaves students struggling to obtain financial stability and harder to repay their student loans; overall contributing to the racial wealth gap in the U.S.

According to Rakim Brooks from the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), and Ashley C. Harrington from CRL (Center for Responsible Lending), the affordability to obtain a higher education is practically nonexistent with the cost being higher than imaginable and beyond reach, unless “they agree to unsustainable debt.”

Canceling student debt would not only help to secure economic mobility and financial stability for students of color, leading towards closing the racial wealth gap, but allow millions of students to build the future they dreamed for themselves when they first enrolled into higher education.

Folkloric Dance Group Performs at Fresno City

By Alondra Ruiz

Fresno City College hosted a Folkloric Dance end of the semester recital on Dec. 5, 2021.

Four groups – Las Danzantes de Aztlan, Fresno State CLAS 106, Fresno City College, Fresno State, and Clovis High School performed a total of eight performances.

The recital was for Ballet Folklorico groups’ families and friends to see their progress throughout the semester.

Three groups under the direction of Dr. Victor Torres, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies at Fresno State, showcased the event alongside the performers.

He explained what a few of the costumes worn and different regions each performance represented starting from North México to the South.

These regions included Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo, Yucatán, and Campeche.

Los Danzantes, Juvenil (LDAJ) is a community-based youth group. This particular group of youths and students at Clovis High are instructed by a former Danzante, Dr. Ray Ramirez.

Los Danzantes, Dr. Ramirez, and Dr. Torres continue to play a pivotal role in maintaining the strong folklorico tradition that characterizes Fresno County.

Dr. Torres states that, “The show also highlighted the mentoring process that I am committed to in order to prepare the next generation of dancers and instructors”.

Individuals of the groups consisted of all levels from beginner to advanced dancers, many of them being first-time performers on a stage.

All of them acquired skills and practiced in footwork, balance, technique, synchronization, body language, and stage performance.

As someone who took part in the recital, there is a community within and around the Mexican Folkloric Dance.

Not being a Fresno local or native but from the north Bay Area, it was difficult to find a place where I can belong. I came upon the Mexican Folkloric Dance class, CLAS 106, at Fresno State where I felt welcomed.

It is a community where we share our cultures, exchange thoughts, discussions, and immerse ourselves in our ethnic folkloric dance. CLAS 106 has not only made me recognize and admire folkloric dancing and México, but understand that there is a process for a performance involving preparation of costumes, hair, makeup, rehearsals, and most importantly commitment and presence on stage.

Nevertheless, I have found a community where I am able to interact with people in and outside of dancing, while also deepening bonds and receiving new opportunities.

Cancel Student Debt

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Las Posadas Celebration at Fresno State

By Alondra Ruiz

The Cross Cultural and Gender Center hosted a Las Posadas here on campus, welcoming students, staff, faculty, families, and community members on December 7 at noon. CCGC’s Latino/a Programs and Services brought a selection of food including pan dulce, champurrado, arroz (rice), tamales of different sorts – red had pork, green had chicken, and vegetarian tamales containing corn. Lotería was played among the people where winners were given out prizes.

According to the CCGC, “Las Posadas” is part of the Christmas celebration. They commemorate the journey of Mary and Joseph, as they traveled house to house to find shelter in Bethlehem preparing for the birth of Jesus. Latinos across the globe celebrate Las Posadas annually from December 16 to December 24.

The popular festivities bring people together that gather to share traditional dishes, beverages, and folklore of their own culture. There are processions consisting of musicians, children, and adults while carrying lit candles and holding statues with reference to the Holy Nativity. Throughout the procession, participants sing religious hymns and passages of Biblical scripture are read.

Each ethnic group has its unique traditional food and beverages during the celebration.

A few of these include: tamales, pozol, champurrado, ponche navideño, atole, and café de olla. Traditional games are played, piñatas are hit and candy bags are given out.

Two Fresno State faculty and staff demonstrated their traditions and customs of their culture.

By Liliana Lopez

“You only live once,” my grandma used to tell me. As a Mexican, as a woman, it is about prayer. The focus is your personal beliefs and they try to contaminate your spirit with others’ words. I’ve learned not to allow others’ words to contaminate my spirit and I don’t take rejection to heart. At times, people have limiting personal beliefs and they try to deflect onto others. Don’t accept those words. When doors slam in your face or your own kind try to bring you down, remember who you are. You are breaking generational barriers, you are building bridges for the future, that won’t be easy. You are worthy of your own dream. You are capable of anything you can imagine. Sure, it takes hard work, long nights, and sacrifices, but it is possible.

The Immigrant

By Alondra Ruiz

The Cross Cultural and Gender Center hosted a La Voz de Aztlán celebration at Fresno State on January 2022.

Dr. Hilda Pinzón-Pérez spoke on behalf of Colombian culture and Rodrigo Gomez on their Mexican culture of the Posadas that take place in December. Dr. Pinzón-Pérez shared their personal experiences, and demonstrated different instruments being played, sang songs, and shared some prayers. Rodrigo Gomez lectured the audience and participants of some historical background regarding Mexico’s Posadas. To Gomez, Las Posadas “is about celebration, it is about family, and it is about prayer. The focus is your religion, your family.”

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“She’s just a wetback!” When I heard those words directed at me, it was as if a bucket of ice was thrown over my head and the reality of my status became, well, real. Sometimes people don’t know the feeling of being an immigrant due to lack of experience, however, those words were said to me from another immigrant, which somehow made that statement ring more.

Story, after story, after story of first-generation graduates tends to somehow lose meaning at times. It could be due to repetition; other times people don’t hear or understand the struggles because we are too shy to speak about them. You can assure me of two things:

1. every single story is unique, and
2. for some reason most immigrants tend to have a fire about achieving that which to most, is impossible.

I tend to have a fire about achieving that which to most, is impossible. Some immigrants, perhaps due to lack of experience, however, I completely submerged into my educational goals and in 2017, I obtained my permanent residency which allowed me stability and peace of mind. I was awarded several scholarships and I am eternally grateful to Fresno State, the different professors, and donors who believed in my dream.

After seven years of working a full-time job, caring for a child, and taking full time classes, I am two months away from finishing my bachelor’s in mass media communication and journalism. There is a sense of “I know I could.”

Beneath the excitement and tears of joy is frankly a bit of sadness. I am saddened that my grandparents passed away a couple years ago and won’t get to see me in my cap and gown. Even though I was not able to see my grandparents, I would often call them and speak to them.

One of the last conversations I had with my grandma Carmen, she said, “Mija hazle como se pueda,” which meant, “Daughter, do what you have to do.”

I know my plans probably were far-fetched to her since she didn’t read or write or finish elementary school, but I knew she believed in my dreams, and she imagined with me. I thought about giving up many times. Lack of support, lack of daycare, lack of work/life balance. I had every reason and excuse to quit, believe me. One thing I have never lacked is faith and ganas! I believe with all my heart that “Si se puede!” It can be done.

I remember I had to take my daughter Abby to several classes due to lack of daycare. The teachers would look the other way or warn me that they would have to kick me out if she made noises. I went home crying many times. Luckily, Abby continued to go, and stay quiet as she drew all over my notebooks for hours. This journey has been hard, lonely, and at times humiliating.

At the same time, it has been life changing and rewarding. One thing I can say for certain is that I’ve learned not to allow others’ words to contaminate my spirit and I don’t take rejection to heart. At times, people have limiting personal beliefs and they try to deflect onto others. Don’t accept those words. When doors slam in your face or your own kind try to bring you down, remember who you are. You are breaking generational barriers, you are building bridges for the future, that won’t be easy. You are worthy of your own dream. You are capable of anything you can imagine. Sure, it takes hard work, long nights, and sacrifices, but it is possible.