

Alexandra S. Machuca

History Graduation Ceremony Speech Submission

“Life is full of surprises.”, “You never know what the future holds.”, “After high school the years just fly by.”, such cliché phrases yet incredibly accurate.

When I think back to eight years ago when I was only a freshman in high school, I could never imagine I’d be where, and who I am today. My name is Alexandra S. Machuca and I am graduating with a double major in History and studio art, concentrating in Latin America and in painting. People are often surprised at my choice of majors and even more surprised to learn that before college my background was predominantly STEM. Why history? Why Art? Why college?

The cause for my interest, the reason I chose the history major I believe was due to three components of my life, my personal story. The origin of these interests didn’t begin in high school, they go further into the tender memories of my childhood.

One of the biggest influences in my life was my grandfather. I can recollect fondly on the small home with warm morning light gently glowing and lighting the space. The dust dancing in the streams of light escaping the curtains, sparkling like golden glitter. My older brother and I spent a lot of time at our grandparents, their house conveniently across street. There was what felt like endless food and a shelves of the most interesting books. My grandpa loved books and he would read them to us until we could finally read them ourselves. They ranged from novels to medicine, from cooking to history. In the hot summers of Bakersfield, I remember grabbing one of the history books, its images of the past placed upon the glossy pages, then I’d lay on the floor underneath the swamp cooler reading until I fell asleep. He used to love old movies too, especially the westerns. We’d sit in the living room watching films of the wild west play out on the screen. Every so often my grandparents would bring out the old photo albums and tell us the stories of the photos and the family we never met, great grandmothers, second cousins etc. I especially remember how their faces would glow, telling us these stories, these stories of my blood, my ancestors whose whole lives remained and ended in Mexico.

My family, my name, the spirits and their stories, all run through my veins. My parents would talk about their childhood describing the difficulties and the beauty of their memories. They described them almost bitter sweetly. Although my parents met in Bakersfield, their families are both from the same city in Mexico. My parents would always say how they had the largest and most delicious shrimp one could ever eat, I could imagine it all the all, the food, the people, the city. Despite the snip-it’s of beauty, their lives were never easy, and then when I’d ask my grandmothers to speak about their past as well I received two very different voices. My grandma from my mother’s side willingly speaks about her life, the high and lows the love and heartbreak. My grandmother on my father’s side often doesn’t speak of her past. We know basic aspects but stories told from aunts and cousins circulate as and we wonder what really happened to lead her to become woman she is, why she rarely speaks of her past. Growing up and not only hearing

these stories but also continuing to wonder about the past further imbedded a sense of curiosity in me. I wanted to know more, who were these individuals and what was their story.

As I grew older I continued to love the stories of the past. Another influential component in my life was a show on PBS called “California’s Gold with Huell Howser”. I probably seen every episode in all honestly. On the show, the host, Huell Howser travels around California in search of “gold” which was actually towns, people and their stories. To this day my parents, when I’m home always let me know when reruns are on, “Alex your hero is on TV!”. I always dreamed of having a job like his, where I’d meet everyday people and they’d tell their story and the history of the place they lived in and worked for. When I was little used to say he was a hero because he told their stories when nobody else would have. Now that I am older I still feel that same way, as society obsesses over the young and famous there was something dear and sweet about that old show. He talked to everyone from the owner to lowest employee. I remember him talking to the elderly, children, even people whose English was broken but their voice still valid, still worthy of being heard.

So, with such reason and love of history one would think I wanted to be a historian from the start right? Well not exactly. In high school I was a part of an engineering academy and participated in various extracurricular and STEM programs. Initially I did not plan to attend college, my parents did not go and most people from my hometown stayed. Fortunately, I had an incredible EAOP advisor who not only convinced me but also my parents that college was the right path for my future. Finally, my senior year came and my mind was made up, I would get a higher education and I was going to leave Bakersfield as well.

I came to UC Santa Cruz alone but unafraid. In what felt like such a short time I have surprised myself with what I have done. I studied two subjects I really love, made incredible friends here and abroad, I danced and played ball. The people I’ve met and the friends I’ve made, I am sincerely grateful for and will cherish immensely. Not only I, but all of us carry with us the stories of how we got to where we are today, stories of our struggles and our victories. As I have noted the three main reasons that contributed to my interests and ultimate decision to study history, were my grandfather, my own family history and my love of an old forgotten show. There are many people who contributed to my progress and success. I’ve had amazing professors here at UCSC and abroad, but my adviser has truly been a blessing. So I would like to thank Stephanie Sawyer for all she has done for us throughout these four years, you were more than advisor to me you were a friend and I can’t thank you enough.

Here ends another chapter in our stories, and for a moment let’s not think of the past nor of the future but celebrate the beauty of this time in our lives. Congratulations to all my fellow History majors! We did it, Class of 2018!