

NORA MONTOYA

STAFF SPOTLIGHT PRESENTED BY HSU STAFF COUNCIL

NOVEMBER 2020

NORA'S STORY

A WORTHY SACRIFICE

Nora's story begins in Aragon GTO, Mexico, from where she would emigrate at the age of 3. Setting their roots in the Inland Empire, Nora and her family began their life in the United States in Hemet, California.

"My mom maybe went to [...] second [or] third grade." Nora's mother didn't have a formal education, and like many mothers, wanted much better for her children. Even at a young age, Nora remembers consistent encouragement from her mother to keep her mind on her education, many times being excused from regular household chores to focus on schoolwork.

With an absentee father, Nora's mother took up the job of raising children on her own. Often doing physically demanding work in production warehouses, Nora heeded her mother's wishes in that she had no desire to see her children work beside her in their futures. Nora narrates "She said 'I'm proud that I am helping to provide...but I want [you] to have something better.'

The sacrifices her mother made weren't held in vain. Nora not only became a first-generation high school graduate, but rose to the challenge of being first in her family to graduate with a four-year degree. Despite the "heavy weight" of having to figure out things on her own in her undergraduate years, Nora confidently credits her accomplishments to her mother. Taking part in tradition at Thurgood Marshall College of UC San Diego, it was her mother who Nora chose to walk the stage with to receive her Bachelors in Psychology. "My degree is her degree and my degree is at home with her [...] It's always going to stay with her."

POST-GRAD INTERLUDE

Upon her graduation, Nora was faced with the question that many other students have had and will continue to ask themselves: 'What now?' Assuming there was not much to do with a Psychology degree except become a therapist, Nora spent a couple of years doing clerical work in the university sector. "I started [to feel] not very fulfilled with the work. I was very grateful for it, but it wasn't very fulfilling..."



"My degree is her degree and my degree is home with her [...] It's always going to stay with her."

Realizing a genuine enjoyment of working in an academic setting, Nora set her sights on seeking employment where her interests were more indulged. Thus began her work as an employment counselor for the Welfare-to-Work program. She describes the most enjoyable aspect of working with clients as being able to help rebuild their education. In these efforts, Nora knew that she was assisting in gaining employment that would pay the bills and also taking part in inspiring career-oriented action within her clients.

After meeting her husband, David, some odd years later, they packed their bags to move out of Hemet, California for the first time, and headed towards Humboldt County. Here, they would both begin working for the Bear River Band of the Roherville Rancheria. Illustrating this experience as challenging, Nora also noted that it was thanks to her experience in social work that allowed her to see the rewarding parts of the work itself.

"[I] always knew that what I enjoyed the most was working [with] students in the field of education." As fate would have it, both Nora and her husband found a job announcement posting on the Humboldt State University website. Within a couple of months of each other, they would both find themselves as employees at the institution. A match made in career-heaven.



FULL CIRCLE AT ACAC

In January 2021, it will be two years since Nora began working as a career advisor for the Academic and Career Advising Center. The department focuses on providing resources to university students that inspire and support success in preparation for post-grad employment. From the way that she lights up when talking about the position, it doesn't seem like Nora is going anywhere, anytime soon.

She expresses getting favorable feedback from her coworkers about her interview. She reiterated their sentiments that they were certain they wanted her on the team "as soon" as they finished the interview. "So it all just worked out [beautifully]," the same I-love-my-job glow lights up the Zoom screen. "I just felt really connected to the work..." It seems that not too long ago, Nora was an undergraduate herself. Navigating a university with little cultural diversity, she found it challenging to ask for the help she was entitled to. Now, she uses her power to an advantage, collaborating with other departments, like the Centers for Academic Excellence, to increase visibility and rapport with students who find themselves in a similar position. "[I am] able to go to their space, and [have] them feel comfortable and recognize me [and be like] 'Okay, I know somebody in ACAC, let me go try.'"

As time passes, this feeling has not changed for Nora, but has evolved into an even deeper passion for the work. Nora is conscientious to shed light on the fact that success in gaining meaningful employment is directly related to actually caring about the task at hand: "I really try to bring up with the students [...] things like how to do a resume, how to structure a cover letter, those can be taught. But, things like your passion and the life that comes out of you [...] when you're talking about something you're passionate about -- that's not something we can teach."

The promise of success for her children motivated her mother to continue to work hard for them. It is almost as if Nora feels the same sentiments when working with students. "One thing that my boss always tells me [...] 'I can always tell when you've met with a student. You have [this glow] and happiness to you'".

"I really try to bring up with the students [...] things like how to do a resume, how to structure a cover letter, those can be taught. But, things like your passion and the life that comes out of you [...] when you're talking about something you're passionate about -- that's not something we can teach."



In listening to her tell it, it seems as if Nora's story has come full circle. She is now in a position to help someone whose shoes she stood in some time ago. However, knowing that she will get to wake up every morning, getting ready for a job that calls her to willful, enthusiastic action, I think we can all confidently agree, that Nora's legacy has just begun.

WRITTEN BY HARREL DESHAZIER
LAYOUT BY MOLLY PUCILLO

