

Interviewee: Zaida Melendez
Interviewers: Owen Podolec and Rose Connolly
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Transcriber: Rose Connolly



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Abstract:

Zaida Melendez was born in El Salvador on August 13th, 1979. Zaida came to the United States with her grandparents at the age of eight. Zaida is married to her husband Jose, and has four children. Zaida has always lived in the city of Worcester and plans to stay as her children and newly introduced business grows. In this interview Zaida discusses her dream of owning her own baking business. Zaida first decided to leave her job in the healthcare industry as it was hard for not only her but her family as well. There were a lot of struggles discussed where there were long nights and early mornings which took a toll on Zaida. After 16 years and a tough decision, Zaida made the move to open her own company called “Belen,” which means ‘House of Bread’ in Hebrew. Zaida explains how she wanted to focus more on the Salvadorian Central American population around Clark University’s campus where her new bakery opens this year. Zaida doesn’t only want her goods to taste authentic to the customer, but wants people to understand that Salvadorian food is still something to remember. Without the continuous support from family, friends, and Clark’s Small Business Associate Development Center, Zaida discusses that she wouldn’t be where she is business wise and emotionally. Zaida is happier and healthier than ever as her new dream is taking off within weeks.

OP: Like I said before, my name is Owen and this is Rose. And how would you like to be called today for the interview?

ZM: Zaida.

OP: Zaida? Zaida.

ZM: Ya.

OP: So just to begin here again, we'll just be working with kind of your overall story for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project. They kind of wanted a transcript on you for your

overall story because they consider you a prosperous woman in Worcester. So starting with kind of like the first set of questions, we're just kind of do a little biography on you. So I guess for the first couple of questions, we'll just be talking about, obviously, what is your full name, including both maiden name, along with married name, if applicable.

ZM: So my full name is Zaida Melendez.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Maiden name is Sanchez.

OP: Okay.

ZM: My middle name is Belen. I forgot that [laughs].

OP: Cool.

RC: And when were you born?

ZM: I was born August 13th, 1979.

OP: Okay. And then if you have a spouse, what is their name?

ZM: My husband?

OP: Yes.

ZM: Jose.

OP: Jose. Cool.

RC: And...

OP: And then did you have any children? Sorry.

RC: No you're good.

ZM: I have four.

OP: Cool. And what are the names and age if...

ZM: Rocio she's 21- no, she's 23.

OP: [Laughs]

ZM: Rebecca is 21. I have David, 13, and Daniel, 12.

OP: Cool.

RC: And do you have any grandchildren?

ZM: No grandchildren yet.

RC: No grandchildren yet.

OP: Ooo. Soon, hopefully, right?

ZM: I keep saying that, but no, apparently not.

OP: [Laughs] Not yet, and then what kind of cultures or ethnicities do you identify as or if you have a family background as well?

ZM: You know I find it [text message sent] [sets phone down on table] very like such a tricky question because you know like so culture I am Hispanic, right? Latin American.

OP: Ya.

ZM: I was born in El Salvador.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So every time I go check the little boxes, I'm like, which one am I. [Laughs]

OP: Right. Okay. Well, can you tell me a little about what like El Salvador is like and how kinda coming over to the United States was kind of a process for you? What age were you coming over here?

ZM: I came at eight at eight years old.

OP: Oh okay. So it was pretty early on for you.

ZM: Yeah. My grandparents brought me.

OP: Okay.

ZM: I was actually raised by my grandparents. My mom was, like, very young or teenage mom. So my grandparents raised me my whole life.

OP: Cool.

ZM: And he came my grandfather came first from El Salvador in the early 80's.

OP: Okay, cool.

ZM: And then the late 80s, he brought all his children, and me and my sister.

OP: Okay, cool. And what was kind of that experience like once you once you started exploring the U.S.? Did you finally decide to come all the way up to Worcester or did you kind of...

ZM: We actually just came here. This is the only place I've ever lived.

OP: Oh okay, cool.

ZM: Other than down there when I was a child.

OP: Oh okay.

ZM: Not really sure why he picked Worcester, out of all places. Back in the 80s there was actually not a lot of Hispanics around, so it was a little bit difficult, I think, to me, not too much because we were children. So we just you just can adapt. Right.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: We didn't know any of the language, so that was hard.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: But my parents, well my mom and her siblings kind of found it difficult.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Because, you know of course, the language barrier, it wasn't as...

OP: Well yeah, it's a whole new scenery for you. We got four or five seasons here.

ZM: It is. I know.

OP: We're going through the winters, the springs so. I bet...

ZM: I remember we came around fall time, so that was totally different. Because we were used to this tropical country, youknow. The seasons don't really vary, so it's...

OP: Oh once fall hits here, it's like it's rush hour. Everything's going on. Because I'm from Maine originally, but I live in New Hampshire now and Rose is from Arizona.

ZM: Oh, wow.

OP: So yeah. So coming from, you know, the outskirts of living in the woods of Maine or living in the hot Arizona sun to now living in Worcester.

ZM: Ya.

OP: It's just a completely different scenery. So it's definitely different for everyone.

ZM: My daughter went to school in Maine.

OP: Oh, she did? Where?

ZM: Yeah, USM. [University of Southern Maine]

OP: Oh okay. Yeah. I trained there for track all the time up in Gorham, [Maine].

ZM: Oh cool.

OP: Yeah yeah. So I was born in Portland, [Maine], but I went to school in Southern Maine. Yeah.

ZM: I like Portland. It's nice.

OP: Yeah. Nice little town. Yeah. Cool.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: And then another question we have here is have you always been in Worcester and kind of where is like the area of Worcester you are? Because I lived off campus my freshman year, believe it or not, because of COVID. It was a mess on campus here.

ZM: [Laughs]

OP: So I lived on like off Chandler Street over by Crowley's that area more towards more Worcester State area. But maybe just a little bit more of, like, a scenery for us.

ZM: When we first got here, we lived on June Street, which is right up that area, Worcester State.

OP: Okay, yeah.

ZM: And it's that's always been sort of a quiet area.

OP: Definitely.

ZM: So it was even more I feel like they were almost, like, depressed at first. They were like there was nothing to do. Not nothing. I shouldn't say nothing to do, but not a lot of people around. You didn't know the language.

OP: You're kind of confined almost.

ZM: Transportation and the winter and it was I feel like the first year was really rough for...

OP: Ya.

ZM: For us just to, you know, get used to the new...

OP: Yeah, definitely. Because you the you have over by Worcester State, it's wicked quiet.

ZM: It is very quiet. It's like nothing going on.

OP: Then you go then you go to WPI and us. Right. We're over by, like, Kelly Square in the central Worcester. Right so you definitely.

ZM: And when you don't have transportation, I remember we walked everywhere.

OP: Oh, my God. I can imagine.

ZM: Everywhere. We walked everywhere because when we first got here, of course, you don't have a car or you know buses didn't run as often back then. And there wasn't that many bus routes. I remember it was like I remember walking from June Street all the way to Webster Square. I don't know if you guys know where Webster Square is, but it was like a good, a good walk. So we go grocery shopping, but we didn't know anywhere else. So we would just go there.

OP: Right, you would go there and you would just assume, oh okay, these are the best prices. I'm not gonna, I'm not going to branch out to here or here.

ZM: We don't know where else to go so.

OP: Yeah, definitely.

ZM: First few years were kind of tough.

RC: And where do you live in the city now?

ZM: I actually do live in Webster square now [Laughs].

OP: You do? Cool. Nice. All righty. And how you liking the area now?

ZM: I love it yeah.

OP: How has it changed since you first got here, do you think? Do you think it's like kind of evolved or like economically? Do you think...

ZM: It's gotten busier. Definitely gotten busier. That little plaza, Webster Square, has gotten much better. I live two minutes from there, so it's...

OP: Okay.

ZM: It's great because I'm, like, in a quiet little neighborhood, but yet like...

OP: You step out.

ZM: Literally a minute later, you're, like, at you know the plaza and everything.

OP: You're right in the middle. You're right. Yeah. The traffic circle. And then you got the train station and all that stuff over there, too, yeah.

RC: And do your other family members live near you?

ZM: Yeah, we all kind of stuck around.

RC: Oh that's nice.

ZM: We've all stuck around. We all live in like basically almost that area, too. Like, the Webster Square area. My grandma is still alive, so she lives with my aunt.

OP: Oh okay cool.

RC: Oh that's nice.

ZM: She lives in the Grafton area [Worcester, MA].

OP: Oh, Grafton. Yeah. By Upton. Cool.

ZM: Yeah, but we're all still here.

OP: Cool. And then all your kids still live with you, obviously. You got kids at school, too, but...

ZM: All my kids still live with me.

OP: Nice. Yeah. Still in the nest for now.

ZM: Yeah. They don't seem to want to leave.

OP: [Laughs]

ZM: That's okay, because culturally, we just stick around anyways [Laughs].

OP: Yeah.

ZM: We don't just leave our parents.

OP: Okay, and do you know what your kids want to do when they grow up? Do you know what they kind of want to adventure out to after college?

ZM: So my daughter just graduated last year, but she still had one more class to take. She took her sweet time to take this...

OP: Get all her credits in.

ZM:take this last class she needed, and she, she did mechanical engineering.

OP: Okay, cool.

ZM: And my daughter, my youngest daughter, who's at Worcester State, is doing business management. Business Administration.

OP: Oh okay, cool. Yeah. So believe it or not, after looking at your, your healthcare situation, I'm actually doing Human Services for a major and then for kind of, like, more of a focus, I'm doing a Healthcare Administration.

ZM: Oh that's nice.

OP: Or consulting kind of work in consulting or financial reports, more or less. Kind of more the numbers rather than kind of the healthcare situation.

ZM: Yeah, probably a good choice.

OP: Yeah. Let's see here. So obviously you didn't live in Worcester before. Did you end up flying all the way up here or kind of how was your travel situation like?

ZM: We did.

OP: Okay, cool.

ZM: We were I honestly blessed to be able to come to the United States, say, the legal way you know like. My grandfather, apparently this goes way back, but I guess his sister came as like as a nanny or something, like some kind of work abroad type of thing. And then she petitioned for her brother to come.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So then my grandfather also came with like his green card, with the airplane, everything, and then he worked at Polar, actually at Polar Beverages.

OP: Polar Park? Oh, for Polar Beverages okay yeah.

ZM: For many years and saved up a lot of money and then petitioned for all for all his kids and his two granddaughters to come up.

OP: Good.

ZM: So then when we did come in [19]87, we all flew here, we all had our green cards. We all were able to just...

OP: Cool.

ZM: Fly nicely instead of yeah.

OP: Yeah Yeah. I think that's...

ZM: Doing the crazy things...

OP: Yeah.

ZM: That other people have to do.

OP: Well right. Yeah. They're coming in illegally or they're doing stuff the wrong way.

ZM: I know.

OP: Yeah. But I think one of the biggest things from coming here as a freshman and to then realizing it now as more of an upperclassman is like all the we're more of a sports team kind of campus. So we have 80% sports teams and 20% is non athletes. So we're very very close, but we're also very diverse. So we have our soccer teams and we have our volleyball teams that are out of state, out of country. And then we have a study abroad campus in Rome, Italy. So I feel like we're getting so much more diverse community from our freshman year to now, which is actually making it a lot more fun campus.

ZM: That is good.

OP: Yeah.

RC: And are there any distinct characteristics that make Worcester the place it is that you can think of?

OP: Or like or think of it as how has Worcester impacted you from when you first came here to now? Or how have you raised yourself?

ZM: Well, I feel like that's probably one of the reasons that I got brave and quit my job was to even see the way that the Salvadorian Central American population has grown over my 30 whatever years 36 years, I think. But we still don't have that many restaurants. Like you see Mexican restaurants everywhere or a bakery.

OP: Yeah. Or you see, like, Indian or you'll see these one or two mom and pop shops that come up out of nowhere. Right.

ZM: Yes. And we love our pastries and our bread, and there isn't anywhere here in Worcester, even though the population has grown. There's no bakery where we can get fresh pastries

because we eat them for like breakfast, for a snack, for anything. We are just really into our bread [laughs]. So that made me realize that maybe that's something I could do because I was doing it at home anyways, and then people were buying it because like I said even though we have grown as a community, there still hasn't been a lot of Central American businesses.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Not that many. There's a fe- couple I could think of, like, restaurants, not like bakeries. There's none.

OP: And why do you think that is? Do you think that's, like, lack of like maybe like reaching out and going out there and doing your thing, or do you think that's, like, lack of resources and more of, like, an internal kind of problem?

ZM: I feel like it's probably the lack of knowledge, because it's it is a lot of work to get a business going. It is a lot of - it's very different from, like, I went this year, last year. I went a couple of times down there and down there if you want to start a business, if you want to start, like, a little bakery, hey you bake in your house and you sell it to wherever.

OP: Yeah there, you go right in front.

ZM: That's it. Like there's no like...

OP: There's no process.

ZM: There's no process. Like I it's taken me months to research and licensing and all kinds of stuff, and I feel that people it's probably like a language barrier or there's probably just no knowledge. Like they may want to, but they just can't almost get it together or figure out, you know what I mean like?

OP: Yeah. Maybe like there should be some sort of class or some sort of club or some sort of thing that should give people this knowledge because like obviously I'm a Human Services major and you can vouch for me like. People understand how much like drugs and addiction can affect someone, but they don't have the knowledge of how to prevent that. So you can kind of tie that similar thing into, oh, I want to start something new and branch off into my culture and kind of promote this thing, but I don't know how to do it. So that kind of silences their voice a little bit.

ZM: Yeah. I feel like maybe that's why. Maybe this is a process, is is kind of a long, difficult road, and there might be, like maybe there's, like, a language barriers or something.

OP: Okay.

ZM: I don't- I'm not sure why.

OP: Okay, and let's see here. Okay. And like you said before, you were going, like, when you first got here, transportation was obviously a struggle for you, and you kind of harped upon your business. Looking at kind of sort of some struggles you faced within the city or some change about the city, how do you think your business may have started from when you first started getting out of healthcare to to now? Have you seen any changes or how long have you been in your business for? If you want to kind of go into a little bit of a debrief about that.

ZM: So, like I said, I used to just bake at home for fun. Just I I always liked baking, so I just you know would find a new recipe and like try it out.

OP: And test on your kids or something.

ZM: Yeah, my husband, my kids, or my family, they were always willing to try, and then slowly, like friends would get involved or my husband's family, and then they were like, oh, you maybe you should sell this to whoever. So it started out as, like, just me doing it at home and...

OP: Doing it for fun, as like a hobby almost.

ZM: Just for fun, and then during COVID when the hospital was just...

OP: Yeah do you want to take me through that? Where did where did you end up working? UMass [University of Massachusetts] Memorial?

ZM: No, UMass, University Campus.

OP: Oh, okay, cool.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: So how was that we kind of, like, took off during COVID and they kind of shut everything down, like, politically? How did that how did that process work? [Phone Rings] Or if you need to take the call, you're more than welcome to if you need to.

ZM: No, I don't think it's important. [Laughs] She probably wants to know about the kids because they're home.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Yes. I had worked there for 16 years. I was a night shift respiratory therapist. I mean the career has always been stressful and demanding.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: Always. Like, no matter what, you're dealing with very important machines, ventilators...

OP: Just situations if you do one wrong thing, it could...

ZM: Yeah, absolutely. We were in charge of running the ventilators, and during any emergencies, like people coding or whatever, we're part of the emergency team. Like we have to like nothing gets done unless respiratory is there. Even if the anesthesiologist were to intubate the patients, well, they still need us to like attach them to machines and. So it was a stressful job to begin with. And sometimes staffing was...

OP: It was short?

ZM: Short. We were short. We were always short. Sort of just because I feel like it's not a very well-known career, like, nursing is. So when I first graduated, when I graduated back in 2006, I got a job right away. They were, like, dying for the graduating students to just start working because we were...

OP: Right, it was high demand.

ZM: It was high demand. And then, UMass, grew. They built you know the second side the second hospital, like, where the ER [Emergency Room] is now. That wasn't there when I started.

OP: They were just renovating and building everything.

ZM: They were building it. So then they needed a lot more staff. So we were always short just because it was demanding.

OP: Right.

ZM: And not a lot of people, I feel, know about the career, so not a lot of people go into it. Now I think that they're...

OP: Where was it on UMass's campus, you said?

ZM: What, the...

OP: The hospital?

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Oh okay, cool.

ZM: Yeah, because cause, UMass used to be just a bunch of buildings, but now it's like...

OP: Well now it's a city, now it's a city.

ZM: Yeah, it's just grown like crazy.

OP: And is that where you went to school as well?

ZM: No, I went to Quinsigamond [Community College].

OP: Oh okay, cool. Nice. Yeah. But looking at the school, like, Assumption going off of the shortage, we have our brand new nursing building over here. You might have saw it walking in, and it's like a \$20 million building, and like all these students apply from high school around the nation. Or notice that we're a big nursing school for Assumption because we were Assumption College before, but now we're a University.

ZM: I saw that.

OP: Yeah. So now we got a brand new sign out front, and we're getting new branding, because now, since we incorporated the nursing factor in our school with all of our sciences, athletic business, now we get to have the statement as university. But I mean I see that as a university. Like, it's great we're having a nursing building here, and we're promoting it because it's such a big thing that we need to have in this day's society with all the diseases going on.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: But we have 200 to 300 nursing students that enter the program, and by their sophomore year, they're cut in half, and now we have 150 people that fail out. And you know I have a friend that's in there right now, and now she's a junior, and now there's 20 kids in the class, and it's going to be 15.

ZM: That's the thing. That's the thing about healthcare yup.

OP: And then that's how they get the shortage, is like it's so like they're so hard to get into, never mind passing the program. So I can imagine...

ZM: So here in Worcester, Quinsig [Quinsigamond Community College] is actually the only college that has respiratory care.

OP: Okay. Yeah. Because I don't even think we offer that here.

ZM: No, Quinsig. is the only one. And then there's, like, Boston or Rhode Island. There's other areas here, but here in Worcester, Quinsigamond is the only one. And same thing. When I started, there was, I believe, 25. The program started with 25 people. I think we graduated, like, six.

OP: Yeah it is insane.

ZM: Because it was just such a demanding plus, it's like an associate. That's all they offer. So two years, they cram the same the same amount of schooling as that Northeastern in Boston does. They get Bachelor [degree] they get a bachelor four years. We do two years. So they cram all this information.

OP: Right. Yeah. You get your four-year Bachelor degree and they shrink it right down [woosh], and you're just stressed all the way out into right. Well, yeah, it's different, too, because we're in Massachusetts, right. And say, if I wanted to get like my counseling degree, I would have to get my license for Massachusetts only. But say if we have your one degree in Quinsigamond, and then people are traveling outside to Rhode Island, Mass [Massachusetts], Connecticut, and it's it's just a long process that's just adding to your plate.

ZM: It is.

OP: So yeah.

ZM: So that was that was tough. So I feel like that's why just the career in general of respiratory care is always just short always just stressed out and short.

OP: And do you think you do you think you wish you could have maybe changed that when first entering college? Do you think you should have maybe redone that or taken a step back and taken maybe a year to think about things? Or do you wish you should have gone to the bakery before or something like that?

ZM: No, I don't think I would have changed it. I really enjoyed my job.

OP: Yeah, it just kind of took over you a little bit.

ZM: Yeah, I really enjoyed my actual job. I used to work in the pediatric floor.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So I was in the pediatric ICU [Intensive Care Unit] and sometimes I had to float to adults. Of course, we don't we just kind of treat everyone from adults, children, doesn't matter. But mainly I was in the adult floors and I really liked it. I just didn't like I think the reason why I decided to finally maybe look into something else was because it was beginning to just overtake my, you know, like my whole life.

OP: Yes. Mentally, just like destroyed you.

ZM: Yes. I was like super stressed out. I was just, you know...

OP: Yeah, I mean, you were just seeing things and experiencing things that people couldn't relate to when you went back home.

ZM: No.

OP: You couldn't just you couldn't just go to your husband or go to your go to your mom or your family and explain, oh my God, this happened to me today. Can you kind of absorb this and deal with it when you can?

ZM: Yes. Yes.

OP: You kind of just had to held that in probably.

ZM: And there were many occasions where we'd lose children and you just leave your 12-hour shift and you just sit and cry in your car because you're like, that was horrible like you know.

OP: Right.

ZM: But then you have to do it over and over and over again, and some people are fine with that. I did it for 16 years, and I was okay like. But it got to a point after COVID, when all you did was just go to work and like lose people left and right, and and...

OP: Right.

ZM: Maybe the support wasn't there for you, like management or...

OP: Right.

ZM: You know so besides dealing with such a stressful career, you also have to deal with just nobody having your back. You know what I mean?

OP: Right. You have to go through your whole day in a life, and there's no one to help you or there's no one to support you. There's no counseling services. There's no HR [Human Resources] support. There's no there's no structural flow.

ZM: I feel like if we wanted to they always did offer, like, counseling or whatever, but it was more of, like, there was such a demand because there's so many patients, and you used to be able to take care of you know, say, 20, 30 patients well, you know...

OP: A day? Or like overall?

ZM: Overall like a shift. Okay, you were able to take care of those patients, but then after COVID or during COVID your workload just doubled. Now you have 60 patients where you can't take care of them. You can't take care of 60 patients you know.

OP: When if you do, it's not the right care.

ZM: It's not the right care. So you know that, but yet you're expected to give the same amount of care.

OP: That just that just tears you apart in that 12 hours.

ZM: It does because you're like how?

OP: What break am I going to get, what anything am I going to get?

ZM: How can I, you know? And I feel like that was when I was like, you know what? This is not going to get any better. I just need a break.

OP: Well you also have to think about, hey, if you're working eight to eight, I got to go back to my family and my kids growing up that I need to be there with and support, and I need to be there mentally and kind of raise them and bring them up, right? You can't so.

ZM: You can't. There was many times where my husband would drop off my little kids, my little boys at the hospital because they couldn't leave, and he had to go to work.

OP: Right, so there just...

ZM: It's not like one of those jobs where you could just be like, okay seven o'clock, I got to go. No, you're in the middle of something, an emergency or whatever it may be. And I'd be like, "Just come drop them off," and he'd run him up to me, and I'd be like, "Just sit right here for a couple of minutes," and I'd be in the room like literally doing CPR [Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation] whatever it may be. And I tell my- I remember one time I told my son, "Just stay in there in the break room. Stay right here." And then we left that morning, and I was just I was just defeated because you spent 12 hours trying to save somebody, and you just can't. And now you've gone over your 12 hours, let's say. And I remember my son, he was probably like five because he was just he was going to school, but he was very young. And he goes, "What happened, Mommy? Did the person die?" And I was like, yes. And then it like breaks you it because they're like they know what's going on they you know they your children are affected. Your whole life is affected by like all of this. You know and I work nights, so I almost felt like I missed their whole life. Like, I used to work even to seven. So I leave the house at like, six o'clock, six fifteen, come back the next morning, they were gone, go to school.

OP: Yeah never mind you were exhausted.

ZM: And then, yes, I was dying to go to school—to go to bed. And then they'd come home for I'd be with them for a couple of hours, and then I then I had to go to work again at six o'clock again. Like so now, looking back, I'm like, I wouldn't change I wouldn't- I don't regret it because I did love my career. I do still love it like if I had a chance, I'd probably I'd probably do it again, but I kinda don't want I don't know. I need a break.

OP: Yeah, maybe you just need to sit back, kind of reflect and...

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Yeah focus on some other things.

ZM: I almost feel like, wow, I missed a lot you know like out of my children's lives because I was working three nights, four nights.

OP: You're just so caught up.

ZM: Just gone. Yeah.

OP: Definitely.

RC: I'd say like relating more to your bakery business like what do you want to go into what like that means to you after starting it by yourself and like how important that is?

ZM: Yeah, I feel like that has been such a team effort with like my husband because even though he you know clearly doesn't bake at all [Laughs], but he he's sort of in the in the restaurant business, he's he does HVAC [Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning], but mainly commercial refrigeration. So he's been kind of like just there for me when I have kinds of questions, like equipment wise or...

OP: So he's kind of like a utility helper, almost.

ZM: Yeah, like he can fix anything for me. And I feel like if it wasn't for him and my children, who've been very patient between me and my stressful job and my always busy, now I'm also taking on almost a second job because at first when I first started, I was still working at the hospital, so I was sort of doing both. I took I took a class with the Worcester Food Hub, which was great. It was like, for entrepreneurs or whatever. I don't remember what they call it, but it kind of kind of like walked you through the process of how do you get your licensing, how do you like just guided though...

OP: So more informational?

ZM: Starting a business.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Which I thought was great because clearly I didn't know any of that. So then I was doing that and kind of the baking on the side and my full time, so my kids and my family have really like.

OP: Yeah, they've almost, like...

ZM: Supported me.

OP: They've almost like accepted, okay, you went through this, and now you kind of want to overcome it. And then start something new and then...

ZM: Yes. And, like, my girls, you know they're older, so they're like you know they're like, oh, we're proud that you're chasing your dream, Mommy. And I'm like, yeah, sometimes I'm not sure like what I'm doing like you know because it was tough to finally decide to give up such a steady career, such a steady job, steady income. You know what I mean like?

OP: Yeah. I feel like it was such a big flip for you.

ZM: Absolutely like I was. And I think I got to the point where I was just coming home in tears, and my husband's like, "I think you need to be—I mean, I think you're done. I think you need a break. I think you need to go do something else now. Go, go do that." And that was and that was almost like my my safe time. Like I would like bake, and my mind would clear, and I didn't think of all the other things that were going on in my life. So that's when I decided, you know what? Maybe I will do this full time.

OP: It's more of like a stress reliever.

ZM: Maybe there is a need for this. Maybe not maybe need, but there is a market and so then that's when I decided to finally like take that big, fat leap and do it.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: So I feel like it's great, like it's great. I'm so happy that I'm doing it, but I'm still so scared you know.

OP: Yeah. Do you want to talk a little bit more about your business a little bit, like, when have you started and kind of maybe, like, the location of it or kind of how the business runs or maybe a little bit of your menu or the process of making that stuff?

RC: Like what does a regular week look like for you?

ZM: Well, it hasn't opened yet.

OP: Oh, it hasn't? Okay.

ZM: No so so what happened is, when I actually did quit my job back in June, I have a lot of friends. I was blessed, honestly, from - to have this lady that worked - goes to with me to my church, and she referred me to like the Food Hub and then to like the Clark Small Business Associate- Development Center. That's what it is.

OP: Okay.

ZM: And so they also guided me through like many many parts, many steps to getting where I am now.

OP: Okay.

ZM: And so then they I found out through my husband because he knows the owner of Acoustic Java.

OP: Okay.

ZM: And also from the Small Business Development Center at Clark. They both talked to me about how he wanted to sort of step away from his spot on Main Street [Worcester, MA] to concentrate on his bigger place that he had where they roast coffees and they do all kinds of things.

OP: Okay so he wanted to expand basically.

ZM: He had already like expanded, but then this little shop on Main Street that was part of Clark's, it's on Clark's property.

OP: Oh, it is? Okay.

ZM: But it's, on like, right on Main Street in Worcester. So he wanted to sort of, not give it up, but but yeah, he was done because he wanted to concentrate more on his roasting and his bigger business.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So then they were like, maybe you should think about this. Maybe you can take over you know the spot or whatever. So then this man, his name is David Fullerton. He's the owner of Acoustic Java. He spoke to Clark about maybe you know transitioning. Like I could take over. And apparently, they love the idea of having a Latin American bakery right in there.

OP: Yeah, that'd be perfect.

ZM: Like right in their area because they are in such a culture like...

OP: Well, so you look at Assumption and like Worcester State, we're more quiet, rural then you go to Clark.

ZM: Yes.

OP: And I feel like it's just right in the middle of Worcester Yeah, I feel like it's right in the middle of everything.

ZM: Yes.

OP: There's so much going on there at all times.

ZM: There is so much going on. And there is a lot that has always just been—I actually used to live there too like right behind, you know that new building that's like across from Clark? I don't even know what it is. I think it's like a student center.

OP: Maybe.

ZM: But anyways, I used to live right behind there when I was a teenager with my grandparents. So that area has always been a very popular area with like Hispanics, Latin Americans, all kinds of cultures.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So I think so Clark was like.

OP: The place for you.

ZM: Absolutely. Great. So then I bought the business. Well, I didn't buy the business. I took over the lease and I bought him out of his...

OP: On the building and kind of created that.

ZM: Yeah, we got it - we got something going. So now it's been - it's not even been a month yet. I just got, I don't even know what date it is. So in like February 3rd I think they handed me the key to the little to the spot.

OP: Cool.

ZM: So we've been, like, renovating it.

OP: Cool.

ZM: Just you know, kind of giving it a little Salvadorian flair a little. Not too much, just a little bit.

OP: Just a hint, right?

RC: [Laughs]

ZM: Just a little bit. Yeah. And making it my husband says, you're just making a girly. Yeah.

OP: Yeah, just saying, hey, we're here. Come check it out.

ZM: So we've been like just doing cosmetic work because there's not much to do anyways like it's...

OP: Yeah. If you're not open, if you start baking stuff, then kind of just doesn't work out.

ZM: Yeah. So I'm hoping that by maybe by next week, I can have inspectors go in there and Board of Health and everybody and hopefully...

OP: Check it out, get it approved.

ZM: Be open by like, first week in March.

OP: Perfect.

ZM: I'm hoping.

OP: Be great.

ZM: And I'm hoping to have like a, almost a combination. I always say I say some Salvadorian American bakery because I'm like, I will definitely have our Salvadorian pastries and our treats, but I'm absolutely going to have our American desserts that I love. Like that's what I started baking. You know what I mean?

OP: Right.

ZM: Like that's what got me into baking. And then I ventured into maybe I can make these Salvadorian stuff like I used to always - when I was a younger teenager before like I make the cake boxes. And I grew into learning how to make everything from scratch, just trial and error my whole life. So I'm going to have like you know the carrot cakes and chocolate cakes and muffins and the cupcakes, all of that American stuff that I do love. And then also Salvadorian. So it's like I always say like I feel like it's a mixture. Like me. Like I am totally like, I mean I wasn't born here I am not...

OP: Well you're proud to be from where you are.

ZM: Yeah like I'm, I've been raised here, so I feel like I am I feel American, but I still have my culture you know?

OP: There's also a part of me right, cool. And that will totally connect to the people in Clark you know. They could easily come in and grab a snack from you or anything, depending on how or what you make you know that can easily be accessible for college students you know hop and grab a snack before they go to class.

ZM: Yeah there that's a really busy spot because Acoustic Java had been there for like 15 years I heard.

OP: Oh, really?

ZM: Since 2007, he told me. And we've like keep the door locked. I boarded the windows, because I'm, like you know we - we're like, just really changing it, just the cosmetics of it, and people always try and as soon as I was trying to like come in and we're like, we're closed. Not yet. You know so.

OP: Nice.

ZM: We're going to keep his coffee. We're going to keep like his espresso's, his lattes.

OP: Oh, good. Cool.

ZM: So he's going to be like my wholesaler or I'm going to buy stuff from him, and I'm going to still offer all the drinks that he offered.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Except now we're going to have pastries and desserts and...

OP: Cool. Perfect. You'll just tie right in.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Good. Cool. Where are we looking here? Do you want to go more to the education side or do you want to start...

RC: I think we'll go more into like your community involvement. Do you consider yourself like active politically in Worcester or if you want to talk about any like volunteer community work that you do?

ZM: To be honestly- to be honest, no. Like I actually said that to someone over the summer because I did a lot of like what it called like pop ups or festivals and stuff. We did, like, farmers markets and my daughter and I, and we'd go to these places and we'd see like people come

around and talk about organizations different organizations or different like societies or whatever, and I was like, wow, I didn't know all this was going on in the city. Because, like I said, like I worked nights.

RC: All of your time.

ZM: All I did was sleep and work and sleep and work and take care of kids.

OP: You just never had never had focused to...

ZM: I never had the time or or maybe even the will because I was just always so tired to even like talk about like all the things that happen in the city. Like I never even followed politics. They were always like, oh, it's time to go vote for whatever. And I'd be like, oh, I want to go to sleep. You know what I mean like it was just?

OP: Yeah

ZM: I was tired all the time or just...

OP: You just had your own schedule, and you just couldn't physically, mentally do anything.

ZM: I couldn't like. So I've never really been involved in all these things, and I feel like now I've gotten to know so many people. Which was funny because at the, like I said at the farmers market, we did over the summer on Chandler Street. There's a little farmers market, and every time we were there, somebody else would come and give us, like, a flier on whatever was going on in the city. And I remember telling my daughter, like, "Wow, I didn't know all these things happened when I was asleep." So I've never really been involved in anything. I think I'm - now I'm trying to you know get more out there and get involved with like so there's, like, a Main South organization. I didn't know that. They already reached out to me because I'm going to be like, right on Main South, and there's like the Latin American business administration, all these things I didn't know existed. Right?

OP: Yeah. People will start reaching out. Oh, who's this over here? Maybe I should go check this out, right?

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Because when I was an underclassman, obviously during COVID I lived off campus. And being from Maine, I don't know what Worcester is about, like, you know what's going on here?

So I lived off campus in my apartment, but during COVID you know I couldn't branch off or experience any of the things I wanted to. So obviously, I'm an upper classman now. I'm a junior here at Assumption. So when expanding you know I did a class last year for the Ace Program. I don't know if you've heard of that in Worcester. It's called the African Community of Education group. And I would go there and donate some community service time and be with them and expand myself into Worcester a little bit. Yeah. So it's kind of cool. So being more of, like, an adult now and realizing oh I'm in a really cool city, I want to go explore.

ZM: Yeah. There's a lot going on here.

OP: Yeah like Kelly Square. We'll go to Polar Park. We play there for baseball.

ZM: Yup.

OP: So it's just all these different cool things.

ZM: Yeah, there is and like I said, I didn't know. I would have never known about this. I would have never known because I was too involved in my own life because I feel like when you're in a healthcare field, that's your life.

OP: Yeah. You're stuck.

ZM: You know what I mean? That's it. Whether you're a nurse, you're a doctor, whatever. You're you're just, it's such a demanding career. And you have to constantly be learning. You have to constantly be like, you have your own things to like worry about. Like the continuing education credits that you have to always get. You have to always go to like seminars or whether they're online now. A lot of them are online now but or every year I remember back in the day, you had to go to [Sturbridge??] for a respiratory care conference. You have to, because otherwise you don't you can't renew your license.

OP: You won't understand.

ZM: So that's your life. Healthcare consumes your life. So I feel like most people, anyways, if you have a family and you have a job in healthcare, you don't have time to look, or to get involved in anything else.

OP: Yeah it is just so time consuming.

RC: You did mention that you went you have a church that you go to. So does religion play like a really good role in your life?

ZM: A big role, yes.

RC: Yeah. Do you want to talk about that?

ZM: We go to a Baptist church. It's called House of Prayer on Canterbury. My family, I feel like as a culture, we're all very religious all the time. Like down in El Salvador, like Easter, Christmas,

OP: Born and raised.

ZM: They they literally close everything during Easter for a week because they call it Holy Week.

OP: Okay.

ZM: And they will close down all the businesses because it's Holy week.

OP: Celebration.

ZM: Yes. And we're not Catholic, we're Baptist, but you know same same deal.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: Like we appreciate all the all the

OP: Qualities in life and virtue.

ZM: Yes, so I feel like that has played a lot - a big role in my life because, I don't know, you find the comfort or just you know your faith just I don't know.

OP: Yeah, it all connects in one way because, say, if you didn't go to that church, or if you didn't build all these connections, maybe you wouldn't be in the same place you were today.

ZM: No, not at all. Because, like I said, like the person who has helped me the most I met from church. And and I actually happened because I she happened to buy a couple of those quesadillas Salvadorian quesadillas that are so popular. And I remember going to deliver to her, her house because she couldn't leave. And and it was right after my shift, so I must have looked like crap. And I gave her gave her brought her the stuff, and I just sat there with her like and I said, I'm so tired of this. I'm so tired of just being tired of just everything. I was like, watch me one of these days like joking, I said one of these days, I'm going to quit my job and I'll start baking. And he's she's like -

OP: Do it.

ZM: “Why don't you?” And I was like, I don't think so like so. Then after that point, she was like, “you know why don't you look into this? Why don't you look into that?” And then she was able to connect me to like literally everybody I needed to you know.

OP: Be successful and set yourself up kind of.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Cool. And did you want to kind of I know I asked you a little about your bakery, but did you want to kind of elaborate of what the kind of the stuff you were making or kind of how that relates to you know some of the food you kind of related to back in your other country of Salvador?

ZM: Yeah. So I'm going to make definitely quesadillas. I know that everybody thinks of the Mexican with the tortilla and the cheese, but these are like a pastry. They're almost like a cornbread.

OP: Okay.

ZM: But they're made with, like, rice flour and sour cream and cheese. So they're like a little sweet, but they're cheesy, so it's like a weird combination, but it's delicious, and it's very popular breakfast or dessert or anything. So that's what I started actually making at home more. And everybody started buying those because you know fresh out of the oven, everybody wanted them.

OP: They were like. I bet you could smell them. I bet you can smell them pretty good.

ZM: Oh, yes. My house smells good all the time. And then but I remember when I was a kid, when I was down there, I remember visiting one of my aunts. It was my my grandma's family, and they had a bakery in their home. So when you visit them, the smell the smell in that house was, like, insane. It was a really busy bakery, and like I told you back there, you could have a business in your house, nobody cares. So I remember their backyard was just always full of like big long tables with, like, mounds of dough. And of course, I was little, so all these mountains of dough were like I was like eye to eye, and I would like (pitch???) it. They were just so so good. So those are like the memories that I have, the very few memories I have from living down there when I was a kid because, you know, so I remember that. So then I would call my aunt and I'd be like, can I have a recipe for whatever? And she'd like, walk me through it. She's retired now. She doesn't own a bakery anymore. But not that long ago a couple - in October last year, my husband and I went down there and I visited her and I spent the whole day with her because, like, I told her, I said I had made all these things, these like sweet breads. There's like a this one called

semita where you have like a like a dough, sweet dough and then like pineapple jam in the middle.

OP: Oh okay, cool.

ZM: I made all these things from like finding recipes on YouTube or or just online.

OP: Or just research, right?

ZM: Yeah, like just trying watching videos or whatever. But I was like, I've never actually -I want to see how you do it.

OP: Yeah, let me see it hands on.

ZM: Definitely different down there like they don't have mixers like we do here like. So I saw - I spent the whole day with her making all kinds of just little you know semitas...

OP: Yeah.

ZM: And all kinds of other treats that I can't remember right now the names the hard way you know like.

OP: Yeah, it's just it's all hands on. Yes. You're doing everything by by physical force.

ZM: Yes. So it was very very like interesting for me. So then I she was able she was like, write this down. So then we had, like, my niece writing down the recipes. We were- she would be like, put some of this and put some of that and three of this.

OP: Add that to the notes, add that to the notes.

ZM: Yeah. And she would be like, no, maybe maybe four instead of five. And I'll be like, okay.

OP: Erase it, erase it, erase it.

ZM: Because they don't have recipes.

OP: It's trial and error, right?

ZM: No, they just they just go by feel or by taste. Or they're like, yeah, that looks good, that smells good or that. And I'm like, oh my God, how am I going to follow this recipe? Like and then she's like, okay, now mix, like, mix it and knead it or whatever. And I was like, oh, boy like.

OP: Here's a workout.

ZM: Oh, my God you know. I really appreciate - learn to appreciate how hard they worked on their...

OP: Right. And do you what do you think- do you think it tastes better authenticated like that or?

ZM: Yes. It's surprising because I tried. I mean, it tastes good here no matter what like, but I tried. When I came as soon as I came back, I was like alright I'm going to do it on my mixer because my husband got me this gigantic mixer that was like 20 quart bowls.

OP: Oh wow so it's big.

ZM: This big big bowl. So I did it, and the texture was not the same.

OP: Not the same.

ZM: I mean it tasted - the taste was great. And it was fine, but I remember because I was kneading it, I remember the texture. And when I ate it, I was like, it's not quite the same, the texture is not. So then when I tried again, I did it by hand and I was like.

OP: There it is.

ZM: What the heck I can't do this all the time by hand you know like.

OP: Well yeah, because you can't be whipping up stuff all the time.

ZM: I got to figure how to [Laughs] I got to figure out how to do it in the mixer because this is crazy. So I feel like maybe you have to adjust because it is all trial and error and it's been taking me so long. I've learned over so many years that like maybe you shouldn't have mixed it that long or maybe not that fast on the mixer you know. So all these things I'm like.

OP: It all goes into the product.

ZM: Yeah, because you know they go at a certain speed or a certain way or and I'm almost have to like try to figure out how to mimic that with the mixer so that I don't over mix. And then the dough doesn't grow as much. It's all these crazy things that happen.

OP: Yeah, never mind like how how would you, from the mixer standpoint, where would you like put it in the oven? Or how how would that kind of process work?

ZM: So even even that is like a difficult a difficulty because it's 90 degrees over there all the time. So you set something up in a bowl, cover it with plastic, it will rise. Like.

OP: Yeah, never mind outside.

ZM: Super quickly. They're just sitting there where in my home, where it's like, 60 or 70 how am I going to get this to rise quick enough? So I think that's why he has to use, like, proofers.

OP: Okay.

ZM: You know where they keep it.

OP: Yeah. So it rises quicker.

ZM: You proof your oven I mean, your dough. So it can rise because you can't just let it sit here. It won't not do anything. Believe me, I tried.

OP: Yeah, and then there goes your business and your profit.

ZM: There goes everything.

OP: Yeah. Yeah, cool.

ZM: So, I mean, I appreciated going down there so I could have an idea or appreciation of how they actually do it, you know how they actually do you know artists, and like all these things. Now I have to try to mimic that because the flavor is great, but maybe the texture is not on - spot on.

OP: Yeah, maybe you would want to see this more authenticated. So people that know do know how it tastes, they they'll be like, oh, okay, this isn't like a fake version or not a good quality version or whatever it is so cool. And then what was your business's name called? We never asked you.

ZM: Belen.

OP: Belen.

ZM: Belen. So Belen is my middle name. And I learned in church that so Belen means Bethlehem, like the city in Israel. It means Bethlehem. And the meaning in Hebrew of Belen is house of bread. So then I was like, I didn't know that. So my kids were like

OP: There's your name

ZM:whoa, your name your name means house of bread and I was like, I didn't even know that. So then when I did decide to go open the business, I was like, I'm going to call it Belen. And So it's like Belen Casa de Pan, in Spanish is House of Bread.

OP: Cool.

ZM: So that's how I came up with that name.

OP: Nice. Good fit.

ZM: Yeah, I figured it was a...

OP: Catchy.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Some people will relate to it. Some people will maybe raise the question and go in.

ZM: Yeah.

RC: This is kind of switching topics but we just want to talk a little bit about your health. So like for your health care, when you transition from like being - working in healthcare to like bread company, how did that affect like your health care? Like was it provided by your job and did you lose that or?

ZM: Yeah, I I had I covered all the benefits for the family because, UMass gives you good benefits.

RC: Yeah.

ZM: You know, I had good health care. I did lose it. So now I have to pay. We have to pay for our own health care. And honestly, it's not that great.

OP: Yeah, it's tough.

ZM: It's not that great.

OP: Well, plus everything's raising.

ZM: Yes. So like it was one of those expenses where I didn't see until.

RC: Until you had to.

ZM: I was like, oh, man, I got to pay all this money now every month for health insurance because even though I was paying it, I wasn't seeing it because it was coming out of my check. You know what I mean?

RC: Yeah.

OP: Now it's going right out of your pocket.

ZM: Now I have to literally like pay it myself. So that was kind of a big bummer.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: I think that's one of the reasons that actually kept me in my job for so long.

RC: From switching.

ZM: Losing my benefits. Losing all my benefits. Because we are a family of six.

OP: Well yeah, yeah you gotta start thinking about, okay, how might this affect my family?

ZM: Yes.

OP: But I need to think about myself too, as well, in terms of that part. Yeah, true.

RC: Do you have any other health issues that impacted you or your family?

ZM: No, luckily, we're pretty healthy.

OP: Good.

ZM: My son has asthma, but not like severe asthma.

OP: That's good.

ZM: So he's managed.

OP: Any of your kids ever complain about college at college being sick or anything like that?

ZM: Well, when my daughter was up in Maine and she'd get a cold or whatever, I'd be like.

OP: Deal with it.

ZM: Sorry my friend if you were here, I'd make you chicken soup or something.

OP: Right. Yeah, I feel like at Assumption, I feel like our health care obviously is pretty well maintained because during COVID being a liberal arts school, you know we were very protective about our CDC [Centers for Disease Control] guidelines, getting the boosters and all the stuff like that. But I feel like with the nursing building, it's kind of not not eased the perspective, but kind of opened it up more, being more accepting of the like the knowledge rather than being scared of it.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: It's kind of better to see it that way rather than being kind of tucked away, read and react rather than react and read kind of thing.

ZM: I know I know that was that was thing like their first round of COVID even in healthcare, we were all like, freaking out. We were like, oh, we're all going to die. You know?

OP: Right they made us wear masks out here, walking around campus, not near anyone. Like we're a mile away from someone and we had to wear a mask outside.

ZM: Yeah, I know. It was scary. And then by like the second or third or whatever, we were like, whatever, man. Forget it. We get it. Like it's fine because, cause you get tired of just you know.

OP: Just get it, and get over with. Yeah.

ZM: Yeah. [Laughs]

OP: What else we got going on here? Looking at some of the conclusion questions as you start filling out that paper, if you wanted to. Just kind of like a broad broad question of like how would you get through your tough times if you ever had like a problem in your day in a life, I'm sure when you start your business, you'll start seeing problems of you know work flow or maybe people people working for employment or not getting the right hours in or something like that. How would you think you would maybe deal with something like that from what you dealt with

before during healthcare, with kind of your mental health standpoint or looking for something new to try out?

ZM: I think it's going to be such a and I sort of worry a little bit about it because it's going to be such a different stress.

OP: Right, I feel like it's so different going from the health field to business.

ZM: And I have I am learning so much like I've been trying to take like you know even like maybe some bookkeeping little courses or because some Clark students are actually from—they were assigned by the business the business development center to help me like.

OP: Oh, in school? As like an internship almost?

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Okay, cool.

ZM: So they helped to help me build up a business plan. I have no idea how to build up a business plan. And they're asking me about, like, projection...

OP: Or like, mission statement.

ZM: Yes. And I was like, “What? How am I supposed to know?”

OP: I just want to I just want to throw my food in there and just, like, show it to people. Seriously! And I'm just like, what? No, I don't know what I don't know you're saying.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: So that time I feel like I have to figure out how to deal with a different type of stress now.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: Now I feel like numbers now. Now I have to deal with numbers, which I didn't before.

OP: In the health field, I feel like you don't...

ZM: No.

OP: With that care, you don't really deal with the numbers.

ZM: No. So now it's like my whole college career was all about anatomies, physiology, chemistry, all these things that I like.

OP: Right, yeah, that was your main focus. Now you're kind of shifting that and then you have to regroup.

ZM: Now they're like I got to figure out how to run your reports, and all these things. And I'm just like, "Oh, my God, how am I going to do that?"

OP: Yeah.

ZM: So luckily, I have like a sister who's a manager a manager at a dental office.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So and she's always been good with numbers. Actually, she's my aunt, but she's the youngest out of my mom's siblings.

OP: Okay.

ZM: So we always had a very close relationship because well, I grew up with my grandparents.

OP: You're close in age.

ZM: And we were very close in age and It's funny, the story. When we were kids, I would do her history homework and she would do my math because I've always hated math. So I would do her history homework and now she's teasing me and she's going, what are you going to do with all this math you got to figure out? Now I'm like, you.

OP: Yeah you're I'm hiring you, I'm hiring you now.

ZM: You going to quit your job and you're going to come work with me.

OP: That'd be nice.

ZM: So luckily I have family that I can turn to.

OP: Kind of lean on.

ZM: But and also that Clark business place has been so helpful with like just you know.

OP: Right.

ZM: I think there's going to be, I just saw yesterday they're going to have like an accounting 101 session. I was like, "Going!"

OP: Totally.

ZM: I'm trying to absorb all like these business stuff now, which is...

OP: Yeah, kind of relatable to obviously being at Assumption you know everyone comes in here not knowing what they wanted or they might have some idea of what they want to do. But like for me, I came in as an Organizational Communications major. I was like, okay, that's pretty broad. Am I going to be good at talking?

ZM: Yeah.

OP: Do I want to take this into business, broadcasting? I could do so much stuff with it.

ZM: Yes.

OP: And I was like, okay, maybe I'll just try out some electives. I started to join you know accounting or business management, start doing all these business classes. I'm like, okay, this is kind of what I want to do, but maybe I want to find a certain specialty of how I want to incorporate this into my daily life. So I'm not miserable with the numbers because I'm not good at numbers.

ZM: [Laughs] Yeah. I mean thank God I have a really big support with my family, you know not just my kids. My kids have been very patient through this whole transitioning, through this whole my my girls are I mean, I I was a young mother, so they're like, you know, I said 23, 21. So they're like adults. They're adults. So they help me out a lot. My oldest daughter is very good. She comes with me everywhere. And then I really miss her when she gets a real job.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: But I said, you have to go you have to get a real job. You're going to be an engineer. You can't bake with me.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: Not until you've been an engineer for a long time.

OP: Yeah, you can bake with me, earn a couple of bucks, then come then come back and help me out.

ZM: Yeah, you got to go. Go be an engineer. We didn't pay for nothing.

OP: Yeah, go start your new life.

ZM: Yeah. I hate to say that, but she has to.

OP: Yeah. I think one of the biggest things for Assumption, too, is how they incorporate like internships and career fairs and stuff like that. I feel like it's really helpful because I mean if you don't know what you're doing, I feel like just as the same as Clark in your scenario, as long as you reach out, I feel like those resources are there and they're able to help you. It's just kind of fitting that into your own your own pathway.

ZM: Yeah. I think that has been like a a big help to deal with. Help me with my stress. I haven't been as stressed out through all these things because I've had you know Clark help me, other people help me, like just guide me through everything. If I had to figure all this out by myself, there's no way. There's no way. I'd be like, you know what? I'm going back to the hospital. Forget it.

OP: Well yeah. Even if there was a way, you'd start five years from now.

ZM: Yeah. You know and my husband has also really been so supportive. I can't even explain to you because he was like, "Do it. Quit your job. Start a bakery. Do your dream." And I was like, "Yeah, but what if this and what if that?" Then he goes, "You'll still have your license. You go back. At least you tried."

OP: Yeah. You'll figure it out.

ZM: I guess it's been scary, but I saw at the beginning when I first did quit, and I don't even think I quit for this. I quit because I was just needed a change. I needed to be done. But I cried for, like, a month because I was like, I can't believe I just lost I just quit my job. Like I was so upset with myself, so upset that I had like I felt like I walked away from my whole life. Like that was my life.

OP: Yeah.

ZM: But now, now I'm better.

OP: Yeah, you probably felt lost. You're like, okay what now, the what now? Factor. I got to start fresh. I got to start new.

ZM: Yeah. What am I doing? Like what am I doing? I sat I asked myself that so many times. I was like, how do you go from this to totally like, but all my friends were like, all my coworkers were like, good for you. We're so proud of you for being brave.

OP: Let me join [Laughs].

ZM: But I was like, I'm not sure if I'm brave or stupid. I have no idea. We'll see. So luckily, so far, it's so far sort of working out.

OP: It's paying off. So far, so smooth.

ZM: So far. Until we open up.

OP: Until it opens up.

ZM: Then you can ask me about my stress, and it might be a whole other story.

OP: Yeah. Good. Yeah. Like I said before, that bio sheet is just kind of for us to keep for our abstract above the transcript that we're going to write. So we'll take our whole voice memo and turn that into words and then send we're actually going to send you a copy of the transcript just to get all of our pronouncing right. And all the grammar right before then before we send that to the Worcester Women's Oral History Project because they'll be looking for that transcript a little bit about you as like a summary before, and then they'll need the Deed of Gift and the Consent form just for confidentiality issues.

ZM: Okay. I was actually surprised that you guys contacted me.

OP: Oh, were you?

RC: You were the first name on the list. I was like [gasp]

OP: Yeah, we chose you first. A baker! We had a list of twelve.

RC: You were our number one choice.

ZM: Aw that's so sweet. Yeah. Because after, I think I got a letter and I was reading it and I told my daughter, I was like, "Look at this."

OP: Yeah, we were wondering how you got contacted or how this came about.

ZM: I don't know. I got a letter in the mail explaining to what it is and that they wanted to talk to me or whatever. And I was like, "Why would they want to talk to me?" And then I went into the to the website. I think there's like a website, right?

OP: Yeah, yeah.

ZM: And I'm looking at all these women who are like—and I was like, "Why would they pick me?"

OP: They're older.

ZM: No. They're like, no, they have like such cool careers. They're like the dean of that or the whatever of this. And I was like, what? Like why would I what am I going to say? I don't know. I thought the other women on the list were so much more impressive than little me. Siblings I have, so I have so many siblings because they're like my parents' side, my mother's side.

OP: Okay. Then...

ZM: Then do I just list it doesn't matter, right?

OP: Yeah, it doesn't matter. Or if you wanted to list them...

ZM: I will just list them all.

OP: Yeah. Or your kids, if you wanted to do that. Or if it's asking for relatives wise maybe just close contact that you have for right now.

ZM: Just so you know.

OP: Okay.

ZM: Okay so racial ethnic background. See, that's where I'm always like, what am I? Hispanic Latin American. I don't even know.

OP: [Laughs] And then how far is your drive from home from here? Not I couldn't imagine more than any 15 minutes.

ZM: No, it was like 15 minutes because I live in Webster Square. I came like the back way, like the airport...

OP: Oh okay. Yeah. So I was in the Renew Apartments right behind the McDonald's where it connects over there, to Worcester State, right by the Cumberland Farms.

ZM: Yeah.

OP: That's where I was at for my freshman year. [shifting papers]

RC: And is there anything else you want to share...to end the interview?

OP: Yeah, do you have any questions for us?

ZM: I don't think so.

OP: Yeah. So, again, obviously, we're doing this project for our Interviewing Techniques class. So basically, in the course it involves, we're learning how to literally interview for when we grow up and go for a job or how to publicly speak to someone. So this obviously helps us out not only for the nonprofit of the project, but it gives us a better understanding of how to you know talk to people that we may not necessarily know, but how to communicate and ask certain questions and stuff like that.

ZM: I see.

OP: We really appreciate your help.