

Script

Opening: (Sarah)

Hello and welcome to the Harrisonburg 360 Podcast. I'm your host Sarah Bruno.

Podcast Elevator Pitch (shared)

The Harrisonburg 360 Podcast is an attempt to capture and record narratives of immigrants living in the Harrisonburg community. Using past and present voices of Harrisonburg immigrants, students in our JMU English class have collaborated to create a space focused on the importance of listening to each other's voices. Every person deserves a chance to share their story, and we, as a class, are privileged to share these stories with you in hopes of expanding perceptions of what it means to be an immigrant in Harrisonburg.

Transitional Music

Transition/Episode Intro: (Sarah)

Each week, Harrisonburg 360 is produced by a different team of students. This week's episode, HOME, was produced by Jessie Beddow, India Williams, Chloe Fallon, Gracelyn Hamlett, and myself, Sarah Bruno. In this week's episode, we'll be discussing the educational experience of a first-generation college student, David Figueroa, whose family immigrated from Honduras. This story explores his educational experiences as a child, his life as a college student now, and the support systems he developed throughout his time in the Harrisonburg community.

Transitional Music

Literary Discussion (All members)

Sarah: Before we begin David's story, we are going to explore some literature related to immigrant's experiences, struggles, and successes. "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant" by Jose Antonio Vargas follows an undocumented immigrant coming of age in the United States. Vargas discusses how he found acceptance and community in his work and school.

Literary Discussion

Chloe Fallon:

Jose writes, "I grew up here. This is my home. Yet even though I think of myself as an American and consider America my country, my country doesn't think of me as one of its own". The way Jose discusses feeling disconnected from a place he considers his home struck me as important to the identity of a first generation student. Jose's stating that America is his home because he grew up here should establish him as just as much a citizen as anyone else. However, he expresses a feeling of rejection that

is beyond his control. Jose describes how this feeling waxes and wanes throughout the life of an immigrant and how his identity has shifted based on this. In our conversation with first generation student David, coming later, we learn more about just how isolating this can be.

Sarah Bruno:

To build upon what what Chloe talked about regarding belonging I found this excerpt from the text saying:

“From the moment I wrote my first article for the student paper, I convinced myself that having my name in print — writing in English, interviewing Americans — validated my presence here.”

In this excerpt I was really drawn to his desire to belong and the feeling that he had to earn it. A particular word that stood out to me while doing a close reading was the word “validated.” “Validated” is a word that can be used in legal or contractual contexts which fascinated me how he used this particular word to describe his experience. An example of validation is getting our parking “validated.” This is a process related to proving that you earned the ability to park for free by getting the approval of a person in charge of the place you are “visiting”. Some places that use validated parking would be hospitals, doctor’s offices, and some hotels. He felt this desire to similarly receive validation through earning approval of others to be in the United States. He felt that he was just a “visitor” and this approval would make him belong. This desire to be accepted by his family, by his peers, and by the country he has lived in the majority of his life was a common theme in this article. Our narrator, David, also expressed this desire to be accepted and belong in his community. He was able to find this with some of his peers, which you will hear about later in the podcast.

Transition Music

Interview intro

Similarly to Vargas, our Narrator found that his home wasn’t where one might expect. David Figueroa found his home in Harrisonburg, Virginia. As a student at James Madison University, Figueroa discovered a community in which he could thrive.

INTERVIEW CLIPS-TIME/QUESTIONS

David (Narrator) 0:36

Yeah, so I’m David Figueroa. I’m a junior accounting major. I transferred from Blue Ridge Community College, about a year and a half ago, came over here to finish my... I got my Associates so I transferred to finish off everything to get my bachelor's and

then trying to see through to the CPA route. My parents are from Honduras, with my dad being [of] African heritage a chance to go back to Western Africa. And, yeah, that's a little short summary.

India Williams 2:09

What was your biggest cultural shifts? Or what was your parents' biggest cultural shifts migrating here to the United States?

David (Narrator) 2:22

They didn't really have one because when you come over here it's not any fun or games it's literally get here, try to find some way to find some sort of income because at the time they had my three younger sisters still there. So they had to get them over here and the way you get them over is that you have to pay somebody to bring them over here. So it's very, so they really, I wouldn't say they had a shot, cuz you know obviously the lifestyle is different here. So like there is, when they got here it was, they got to find who they knew who was already here and then from there just trying to make money to bring my sisters over.

India Williams 3:06

Alright, question two: who lived in your house growing up?

David (Narrator) 3:11

So when I was younger, at some point, all my sisters worked, but they were so much older than me. The youngest out of the oldest is 10 years older than me. So I don't think there might have been a time they were all three with us when I was in high school, when they were in high school. But I only remember one of them, my younger sister, being in school when I was in like elementary school. But I would see them all the time. My oldest is the one who really raised me cuz my mom worked. They left from five in the morning to like seven at night because they worked in factories. So my oldest sister was the one that took care of me, she's like my mother figure

India Williams 4:22

What does home look like to you?

David (Narrator) 4:26

Home, that's complicated because we're not a close family. Like we are but we're not. Like we don't say like your average similar things. But like home for me, it's anywhere that I feel comfortable. So like I've moved, I've lived in so many places, but I ended up coming back to Harrisonburg. So I feel like Harrisonburg for me is home. Even though like I would love to go back to Chicago. I had the best time of my life when I was living up there or going back over there but I always end up coming back here to Harrisonburg. So for me, Harrisonburg was more of a home feel. And then wherever my parents are and my sisters

India Williams 5:05

Can you describe your educational experience growing up?

David (Narrator) 5:08

Oh man, don't even get me started. I hated school. I was so bad because if you think about it, my parents weren't home, my sisters were doing their own thing. They're all in either high school or about to finish high school. And everybody knows how you are at that age. And then you have me. I didn't do any work, because a kid's not gonna sit there and "Oh, let me do homework. Let me read". And I would have to sign everything for myself. Like I signed every important document. I filled out every document I had to do for school since I started elementary school. So like, I knew I didn't have to do anything. So like when I got in trouble and had to sign stuff, I signed it. I filled it out. To this day, I still fill out things for them. And I just didn't like school. It was just, I didn't want to be there. So I hated it. I didn't do great in school. I was reading, I don't think I learned how to properly read til like the fourth grade, fifth grade. And that's been a struggle ever since. I hated reading out loud. You know, like, you get nervous when you read. I just couldn't read words. So like, I would like figure out which one and try to read it because I was nervous because I didn't know how to read well compared to everybody else. I just didn't like. I got special treatment. So like we had a list of spelling words. I got half of them. So like, I didn't feel like, I felt like teachers just passed me along. So like I barely made it out of there.

India Williams 6:38

Who was your favorite teacher? Did you have a person you looked up to?

David (Narrator) 6:45

Uhm, There's a few. I know in elementary school there was, I don't know why I remember Miss Churchill, she would always look out for me. I guess she understood where I was coming from. She's actually a principal now at Smith and I actually went back to Smith and for my niece. And she recognized me. uhm, What else? In high school I had a couple. I had, not that they were just really good to me like they were always cool. I was struggling then. So I had Mr. [?], our history and US government teacher. I had back-to-back-to-back. So we got pretty cool. But the teacher I really liked the most I would say his name was Mr. Scott, the English teacher. I hated English. But he was a cool dude. He was hilarious. And he actually, when he taught his class, the books we read were actually pretty cool and I actually enjoyed them. But another teacher was when I was at Skyline Middle School here in Harrisonburg.

Her name was Ms. [?], she was the first and only Black teacher I ever had. And she was a really cool tool. She was a science teacher.

India Williams 7:54

What challenges did you face growing up? Like racism, language barriers, identities, etc.

David (Narrator) 8:19

Yeah. The language barrier, coming from parents that don't speak any English was difficult because I wasn't around them. So I didn't pick up Spanish early on. So like, I might have acted, why I didn't talk to my parents when I was younger. Like it wasn't bad, but compared to what it should have been at the time. I didn't really experience racism early on because even as a kid, you're oblivious to it. You don't really know what it is because like I've been in all these diverse areas, like, if you're poor, everybody's poor or if you're broke, everybody's broke. So you're in the same scenario. Like if somebody is doing illegal things, you always feel like everybody's in the same boat. So like I didn't experience any till, you know only when I started coming back when I came back to Harrisonburg. I was walking, I remember in school like a group of my friends were walking and they were like, "Oh look at what he's doing". He wanted to [?] Mexicans at the time. I remember that like it was yesterday. I was like, dang, they really just said that. And then identity struggle what it might be, especially going on because I'm like, I have African heritage in my, in my DNA. A lot of, I remember a lot of Hispanics would get mad at me, especially in high school when I started playing basketball. Because I was always with all my friends that were black. And like they accepted me, you know, they saw me as one of them. And like, I think I started playing basketball my sophomore year and they like, I didn't find this out until my senior year. They were saying this like, "Oh, he's changed you don't mess with you don't mess with us. You don't mess with the Hispanic culture anymore". Just because I was hanging out with different people and playing basketball because I see these guys every day. We're running it out together. So that didn't start until high school because, of course, my freshman year I knew them because I went to that middle school then, you know, you meet new friends and like that's never sat right with me the way they said that. Because it shouldn't matter who you hang out with, like if you're cool with somebody doesn't matter. So I had that issue because I didn't know, because growing up a lot of my friends were like anyways, so like it was just always a dilemma. They're like "Oh he's hanging out with them, why is he not hanging out with us". Especially now I'm in LSA. But I don't really know that many people in LSA because I'm involved in other things. But like it's just so that [?] like oh, he's not a part of it.

India Williams 10:46

Can you tell us what LSA stands for

David (Narrator) 10:49

so LSA is the Latinx Student Alliance at James Madison University. But I also do a lot of stuff with like, like the African Student Alliance and like, you know, and SGA so that we do for DIJ. Stuff like that.

India Williams 11:48

Accounting. Why did you choose accounting as your major?

David (Narrator) 11:52

Growing up all I would see on TV was people in suits making money and a lot of their majors are finance, marketing, stuff like that. And a lot of stuff I learned growing up was from TV because I didn't have anyone else to teach me. My parents were working. So a lot of stuff I learned like life lessons, like skills were from either shows I watched, or from literally just, literally TV, like in general. So I saw that and it kind of stuck with me, you know, how you take those tests like as a kid, oh, what career every time I had to take it had to do with either working in finance or something, every time.

India Williams 12:28

Question Eight. What has your college experience been like?

David (Narrator) 12:36

It hasn't been easy for me, because my education background compared to everybody else is not the same. So I've really had to like I remember, when I first graduated high school, I was still playing basketball, I was on track to play D2 basketball. But I couldn't keep my grades up my first semester, I ended up with a 1.9, in my first year at Blue Ridge. So that made me ineligible to even play basketball. So I decided to stop. And then just focus on school and that alone, I ended up graduating with a three. But that wasn't easy for me because I had to literally sit there for hours like it might take somebody an hour to do a project. It took me two to three hours. Because you know, I don't know, I don't know how to do anything like I was skated by high school. I don't have any good habits for school because I've never been shown. I don't know anybody who's been in my scenario again, growing up the only people I knew who graduated college or went to college were teachers.

India Williams 13:29

Why did you choose JMU, after Blue Ridge Community College?

David (Narrator) 13:32

I always knew that the accounting program was always good. So that was always going to be one of the options after and it was right here in my backyard, basically, like, let me just come out, finish out and just get my degree. And then from there, move or do whatever I got to do after that.

India Williams 13:59

Does your career goal differ from your childhood dream?

David (Narrator) 14:02

No, my career goal has always been to never be in the same financial situation that I've been in my entire life. Since I was since, I can remember that's always been my, my goal hasn't changed to this day.

Connection Section

This was just a snippet of an extremely enlightening conversation with a first generation student. While Jose found a community in his school and David in clubs and sports, they both found it important to find work that would significantly change their financial situations. Though in different places, both David and Jose found a community for themselves while simultaneously being pulled between two cultures.

Transitional music (shared)

Conclusion

Through poetry and conversation with an immigrant from Malawi, the next episode will expand on what home is through discussions about culture.

Closing

Thank you for joining us today on Harrisonburg 360. We're grateful to Kate Morris, Bodeene Amyot (*bo-DEEN* AM-ee-ot), Sarah Roth-Mullet, Kirsten Mlodynia (Kearsten Mlody-dean-ya), and Harrisonburg 360 ([Facebook @Harrisonburg360](#), [Twitter @360Harrisonburg](#) [Instagram @harrisonburg360](#)) for helping make this episode possible.

I was your host today, Sarah Bruno. Interview with David Figueroa was conducted by India Williams. Our research and content producers were India Williams, Gracelyn Hamlett, and Jessie Beddow and our audio producer was Chloe Fallon. Join us next time for the next episode (for now, title currently unknown for group 2's episode).

Outro music (shared)