# Audio file

[2023-10-14-0007 and 0008.mp3](https://indiana-my.sharepoint.com/personal/mlandin_iu_edu/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/2023-10-14-0007%20and%200008.mp3)

# Transcript

Interviewer

All right, I just started the recorder. All righty. My name is Dhakir Abdullah and I'm interviewing the community member who contributed object ID 2023-10-14-0008 as part of La Casa's 50th. Anniversary community archive. So which memory do you like to share with us today?

Ruth Vaca

So the memory that I want to share today is about how I found out about La Casa, because to me that is such a great experience to document. I think it should be the first. Question we asked everyone during these interviews. How did you hear about La Casa? Because everybody has, I think, a very similar story. Somebody told them about La Casa for the most part, right? And it could be a classmate or it could be somebody you met at a party, or it could be a sibling. We have a lot of that going on here. Where, oh, well, my brother was here, or my cousin or my sister or whatever, or my parents, and that's how I know about it. And I really like that because it it proves that that throughout generations, people enjoyed their experience here so much, or they got something that they were excited enough to share it and recommend it to somebody else. So what happened with me was that I was finishing, I I'm not from Bloomington, but I decided to finish high school in Bloomington. Basically, it was a a financial move on my part. I wanted the in state tuition discount, so I moved to here while my brother and sister were finishing college, and I lived with them. So a high school student. And I went to a really cool Independent School called Harmony School. And a lot of people don't know about it, but it is a private school and the reason why I went there was because you didn't need parental guardians or any guardians. They believed that a lot of kids don't have that. So why should a school demand that of them? They all deserve an education. And so my parents obviously did not disown me or anything like that. It wasn't that case, I just was very independent and driven and focused and I wanted to save money and I wasn't sure what I was going to study. So I said let's get the best deal and this school has proven to be a great place. Just from saying what my brother and sister got out of it. And so I remember, at some point my sister brought me to like Casa. And I can't remember what she was going here. But she told me, like, "Oh yeah, this is like, this is La Casa" and, you know, maybe she started here once or twice. She wasn't very active, but I was 17. I was finishing high school, and I was taking advanced college classes. Like early college classes. So I was on campus all the time and I just decided to, like, come here and, you know, there were flyers and stuff. And back then I wanted to be involved. I just was one of those kids that just really wanted to be involved in things. And so I decided that I really wanted to be part of the salsa dancing group or the dance club. And back in my time it was called the Latin Dance Club, and now it's turned into Basra Basso. So I asked if I could join it because I was 17 and I was in high school, but I was taking classes here so I had a loophole to participate in activities, and I remember Lillian and I remember the leaders of the group, and obviously, you know, they were a lot older. I was like you. I was very young and but I was very precocious and just curious and I wanted it. To be part of something and I missed being part of the, you know, community so much because I just moved from South Florida, where it's full of Latinos and diversity and and then I also grew up in Northwest Indiana and Chicago. There's a lot of that, Latinos as well and and diverse people. So coming here and knowing that the population of Latino students was like less than 5% or 4, about 4% then. I thought, wow, like, no wonder I feel a little isolated, but here's the place. OK. Here are my people. We yeah, salsa dance like I don't I want to learn how to salsa dance better and I thought I was a good dancer. But then I saw these people in my I don't know anything like I I gotta get better. I only know really cumbia and other stuff and so I joined the club and they were so sweet to let me in. And when they, you know, when all of the students found out I was 17, they were, they were very kind to me. And so anyway I I did it for a little bit and then I got really. Busy and I actually didn't come to La Casa, as much during undergrad, just because I found my way and I don't know. I just. I had like, a very involved life because, UM, my high school friends, also a lot of them came to IU, so I didn't need to make new friends. I already had friends, but I do regret not coming here more so this the point of the story is that here we are. You know, 20 years later or however long it's been, and I'm back living in Bloomington, which I never thought would happen, and then suddenly, I'm just job cruising, and I find this position and and I go "Wait a minute. Who? Who's what is going on with La Casa?" So I look it up. I see that Lillian is here. And I said, "Wait a minute. Lillian was there. She's the one who let me be part of this thing. Like she took grace on me, right?" She was like, yeah, you're cool. Like you're not easy. But don't tell anybody. Or like you're fine, because you're a student. You're there's look, I can't remember what the conversation was, but it was very casual and cool, and I was very mature, so I looked, I looked like a freshman, you know? And so, I just felt like it was, it's such a beautiful memory to share because since I'm 17, La Casa has a special place in my memory. But Lillian has a special place in my memory because I just remember thinking, "Wow, that woman is a powerhouse like she is so awesome. She's really like that is a great place." I just always had an admiration for her. So, to work with her now is such a fulfilling full circle experience. And I'm just so grateful for it.

Interviewer

That's awesome. I'm sorry. Did I cut you off?

Ruth Vaca

Yeah. No, no, that's it.

Interviewer

Thank you so much for sharing that. Maybe you've already kind of covered this by answering the first question, but if you feel like you have something else to say about it, then you can say it. I'll ask the question why is this memory significant to you?

Ruth Vaca

So, the reason why this memory is significant to me is because ever since I was young, and because I was moved around away from the Latino community at a very young age, and I and I felt the impact of that without knowing what it was, like the professionally or academically with I was I I was. I was placed in a place where I mean, if if you think well, there's not a lot of minorities here on campus, imagine even less, you know where I ended up moving. I was literally the only one who would volunteer that they were a minority in my school. Everybody was almost, like embarrassed or shy or kept it a secret. So yeah, because it was mostly white population, and unless you literally looked brown or a different color like, everyone just assumed you were white or Italian or Jewish or Eastern, you know, or whatever it was. And so for me, at a very young age, I I wanted to keep my culture alive because I'm also an immigrant and I was taken away because my mother wanted a certain future, right? She wanted to to get us here for certain things and and privileges and obviously that was her choice, not mine. And that's OK, you know you're a child. You can't make all the choices for yourself. But a part of me always grieved that because it separated me from where my parents are from. It separated me from my motherland. I didn't have papers for the first, you know, 8-9 years of living here. So I always felt a need to connect with where I came from in that sense. And so La Casa and the memory is just a reminder even to myself, like there's always a way to connect. How do we do that? And obviously, everyone here is also looking for a way to connect with themselves and their ancestors. How can we do that? How can we make it better? And also acknowledging obviously that everybody has an array of ancestors right? Like mine is very Mexico specific, but you know, I found out through my genetic testing and stuff that I I have some other blood lines. You know, there's Jewish, there's African slavery. There's all sorts of history that I am now just finding about. So I I just love that, that this Cultural Center is really not only for academic support. But also for support of finding where you came from and then where are you going?

Interviewer

Very good, very good. I think you've already answered this, but it's how does this memory relate to your experience about you?

Ruth Vaca

Well, I guess, yeah, I think it's just it was the first place that very openly and and sweetly welcomed me at a very young age. I didn't have to try very hard either, right. I just kind of showed up and asked "hey, yeah, like I'm still in high school, but I'm taking classes. And I'm 17 I wanna dance. Can I? Can I dance? Can I learn how to dance?" Yeah.

Interviewer

OK, how does this memory relate to your identity, and you might have already covered that too.

Ruth Vaca

Yeah, I feel like I covered that for sure. It's just, you know, obviously, dancing, food, music, all of those things are resonate with, with, with our culture and every culture, those, those things are very important to us. So yeah.

Interviewer

OK, very good, very good. Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to speak about?

Ruth Vaca

No, I I'm. I think that's it. I just want to point out that now I have a four-year-old if, and if for some reason we're still here when he was in college and for some reason he wants to come to IU. I love the idea of hoping, and I do hope because you never know what's going to happen, but this is why cultural centers are so important. I hope that one day he can work study here, or he can just hang out here or whatever it is and it would make me so happy and it would just be such a such an awesome thing to witness, right? Like another generation. And it's it would be, it's specifically important to me because he is half Polish, Scottish and half Mexican, so I want him to never be confused or feel removed from where his parents are like I did. I want him to know that there are places where he can connect to his identity, whatever he feels, his identities are.

Interviewer

OK. OK. Well, thank you so much for participating in there. I really appreciate you sharing your stories with us.