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Oral History Conversation with Monserrat Perez Corral (Whatever It Takes)

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MONSERRAT PEREZ CORRAL (WIT)

with Andrew Schlegel and Brianna Boretto

Brianna: I just want to ask you what your overall childhood was like, and um, yeah we can start with that and then I'll ask you the next question.

Monserrat: My childhood was a bit complicated; I lived in San Ysidro here in San Diego and also in Tijuana. So I went back and forth and also my dad he left a lot for his job or he just lived in Tijuana all the time. So I just grew up with my brother and my mom. And sometimes my other family members would come and live in the house, and it was a small house, so I'd share with my cousins and everybody just like a typical Mexican family haha. With the whole family in the house. And yeah I guess I grew up mostly with my brother since my mom she lives with us in San Ysidro but she would go back to Tijuana every morning and come back at night just for job. So I mostly had time with my brother. I would play around with my neighbors in Tijuana and in San Ysidro, and it was nice childhood I guess. I had a lot of free time and yeah.

Brianna: Nice! What were there any specific childhood experiences that might have served as like the seed for you wanting to start the social venture, or becoming a part of [WIT \(Whatever It Takes\)](#)?

Monserrat: Uh yeah. Actually, since my parents are Mexican and I would go back and forth from Mexico to the U.S., and I went to a public school in elementary school, and the principal of my school would always pull me out of the lunch line and was like "Do you live in Tijuana, just be honest with me you live in Tijuana", and I was like "No, haha I live like right across the street! What are you talking about?" Then I would come late to class like in the morning I fell asleep and I didn't wake up so I went late to school, and she would be like "You were late because the line was long right? Because there was a lot of car crossing the border?" And I was like "No I just fell asleep" and I would get like constant visits home so that the district could check that I actually lived there. And they well yeah that would happen. And I guess I just felt a lot of judgment going to me and also to my brother since we went to the same school. And I felt like it was like not fair like why was I taken out of lunch line, why was I taken out of class, just to be asked those questions? When I mean I live like a block away from school and I would walk to school. And they would go visit my home and they would see like I'm living there I'm not living in Tijuana and I'm not doing anything illegal. Just because my parents are Mexican doesn't mean that I'm not a U.S. citizen, and that we pay taxes because we live there. We pay rent, we pay everything, we spent for living, we bought here in the U.S., so yeah. And I guess that really started me like well there's a lot of injustice. People are being judged just because of their past or maybe a family member, or just of something they look like, and that's what really thought me like oh I need to start being like get into social work. And then also, I'm in the international baccalaureate in Tijuana, and we take a class which is called "CAS" - Creativity, action and service - which is CAS. And we have to do like social work and get social hours, community hours.

Brianna: Oh that's really cool!

Monserrat: And at first we were like ohhh... We don't really want to do that, my whole generation we were like oh but we're too lazy and what if we don't have time? We need to do 4 hours per week, so every week we need to make at least 4 hours. And but when I started in my I think it's my sophomore year? Yeah sophomore or Junior... Yeah High School. And so I started going to uh build houses for poor people, we got to go clean the beach, uh I did had a recycling program inside school so that's pretty fun. And I think that got me up to like why I like working in society and stuff.

Brianna: Right, that's awesome!

Andrew: Um okay so, you kind of answered this question a little bit, and how you kind of - well I guess you could elaborate on it more. So how did you kind of come to join, is it WIT or W-I-T?

Monserrat: Yeah it's WIT haha. We call it WIT. So I joined this program it's pretty funny because I wasn't looking for it but I think it was actually I don't know, I think it was USD or UCSD, that sent a memo to my coordinator saying that "oh if students in Mexico want to get like apply to colleges in the U.S. we have like a mentorship program where we can tell them what like the process is and everything. And since uh I wanted to study in the U.S. for college, my teacher sent me that memo but it was like different events memo. So one of the events was like the Whatever It Takes program, and I was like Oh! Haha okay so I read it because the other memo, the other event for the college was already like the date had already passed. So I was like damn, I missed it! And then I read about the program and I was like oh I can still apply? So I looked for and did some research and it reminded me of like my class that I take with just CAS and how they mix it up with like enterprises and your own business and I was really like interested so that's why I decided to register and see if yeah can I apply? Can I join? Haha, they accepted me and so I joined.

Andrew: Okay, thank you. Uh and then what do you consider to be the most valuable learning experience you've had with WIT so far?

Monserrat: Um, we have this - are like the founder of WIT, Sarah Hernholm, she has this like 11 WIT Tips, and I think they're really really helpful. One, that I always have it on my mind is KISS - Keep It Super Simple: and it tells it just tells like sometimes you have like a project, an event, a conference, or whatever you have to do it's not just one thing and it's really important for you, and sometimes you just you're overwhelm yourself with the things you have to do. Like oh I have a birthday party I have to do this, I have to go get the pizza, the cake, um the drinks, like everything the presents. Sometimes it's like well you don't have to go like all the way like you can just keep it super simple and you can still get the same amount of achievement that you would've gotten if you would've gone like extravagant and stuff like that. I think that's a one of the learnings that stuck to me, and also another tip is show up for yourself and another one is don't let - I can't want it more than you. So she tells us constantly "I can't want things more than you want them, so if she invites us to something like she wants us to show up for ourselves if we really want to keep going inside the class and for enterprise and also she can't want it more than us because she can't be like are you going? Are you going? Where are you this project? Are you have you contacted the person have you sent the emails have you sent the call, have you done your speech? Have you done this have you done that? Like she can't be doing that because that would mean that she's doing all the work and reminding you and what I realized is that she treats us like adults so we need to have our things planned our things structured, an agenda, where we um write all the things that we can do so that really helps us grow as a person. And actually show up for ourselves and wanting things for ourselves and not letting other people push us around to get to where we want to go because it's our process so we have to get there and yeah.

Andrew: Cool.

Monserrat: Haha yeah.

Brianna: I like that haha! I wish my teachers told me show up for yourself more often. It's a very like motivational -

Monserrat: It's strong!

Brianna: Yeah! Very strong. Um my next question is very similar to what you've just been talking about so do you want to go ahead and skip onto that next one that you have?

Andrew: Uhhh sure! So, you know you're pretty young were all pretty young, uhm and life can be pretty trying as a young adult. So, how do you you know balance both WIT and being a young person?

Monserrat: Okay, that's a good question actually. Um so I don't only have WIT and being a young person I also have school, I have I'm a senior so I'm applying to colleges I'm seeing where I'm going, where I'm moving, where I have to get an apartment, scholarships, everything. And I also need like my personal life my social life with my friends with my family and so it's really nice. So WIT is 2 hours a week and I come downtown and take the class, so on Tuesdays I can't do anything. Tuesdays is way fast so I wake up at like 5 am go to school because it starts at 7, I end school at 3, my dad picks me up and drops me off at the border and I have to go running so that there's no line so I can catch the trolley so that I can get on time to class. And then when I leave class it ends at 8 so I have to go running so I can catch the trolley and get home early like not get home that late. So on Tuesdays when I have WIT I can't do anything, not even homework. If I have homework for Wednesday I have to do it like days before. Um because I can't do anything else on Tuesdays cause school and WIT I get too overwhelmed. But in the other around the week I do hang out with friends especially on weekends. But I have my enterprise is focused and I sell hats - and -

Andrew: What's it say?

Monserrat: You do you and I'll do me on the back. And it comes with the judgment thing. And so I get um people buy them sometimes online so I have to come to the U.S. and ship them so I usually do that on Saturday's so I come in early, I go and ship and if I want to go shopping I have some time for myself. I walk around and I go shopping. And then I would normally go out with my friends for the night, or the afternoon. And um so my weekends like on Saturdays is designated for that like for my friends and for shipping hats so that's how I um - and then Sunday's is family day so I always spend my time with my family on Sunday's. and I just concentrate the rest of the week, during the week it's WIT school and sometimes friends also. But it is like a tight schedule.

Brianna: That's a lot!

Monserrat: Yeah, 'cause I also have to do my community service that's 4 hours a week. So yeah.

Andrew: Do you know where you're going to go after you graduate High School?

Monserrat: Yeah, I'm going to Tecnologico de Monterrey in Mexico, which is like the MIT of Mexico. 'Cause it's Monterrey Institute of Technology.

Andrew: Haha that's funny!

Monserrat: Haha yeah it's a joke. You're supposed to laugh!

Brianna: Haha no that's great! It took me a second. I was like "what do you mean," but you spelled it out so thank you! That's awesome though, do you know what you want to study?

Monserrat: Yeah economics, I know it's like far from what I do but it's nice..

Brianna: I mean you do a lot that's business oriented which kind of is very in line with yeah.

Monserrat: Yeah I'm looking for a way that I can connect it eventually in my life so yeah.

Brianna: You'll figure it out, you have plenty of time!

Monserrat: Yeah!

Brianna: I wanted to ask, so when you do WIT it gets it's just on Tuesdays, what is like the typical thing that you guys do in like your, is it like sessions you know what I mean? Like what would your average day look like in that?

Monserrat: Okay so we get inside class and we have like a teacher and we have a board where it says everything we're going to do and we practice this exercise which is like, I don't know if you know it, um like mindfulness? Where we just stop and breathe, we do that like for 5 minutes. Yeah for 5 minutes, and then we have like a high low dump where we talk to our partner about what was the high our day and the low is the dump and that just gets like the session started. And then we have announcements, the teacher gives it to us and we have like an event we have to prep. Or like a speech we have to do or some emails that we have to write we do it there. And then we just um we just work on our enterprise. Like at the beginning when it started which was like October, yeah um we had to create an enterprise so all the classes we worked on what we liked to do, what we liked to do in our society, how we are so that we could connect those three things and build an enterprise that we actually like and that would actually help our community. So those were that the few months looked like and now that we have our enterprise...

What we like to do what we like to do in our society how we are so that we could connect those three things so we can build an enterprise so we actually like and that would actually help our community. So those were what the few months look like and now though we have our enterprise established we look at our SWOT analysis. That's what I do, the advantages the disadvantages um I don't know how you call it...

Bri: SWOT, right? – Strengths, Weaknesses [Opportunities, and Threats]

Monserrat:

Yeah that! And I just look at them and what do I have to do? what's wrong? I have to see if I want to do a new design or need to contact them like thank you cards or thank you note thank you email since the other days of the week I won't have time to do that I dedicate that time to that. We also have a lot of guest speakers that come in and just talk to us about their experience as entrepreneurs or social entrepreneurs that's pretty interesting because we get to know how they started and we see how they are now and they tell us about what has happened in all those years and the rough moments the tough times and how they get over them and that's really helpful for us and yeah that's what it likes.

Bri: Have you had a guest speaker that you really loved or has been an inspiration to you?

Monserrat: I think all have really cool stories. It's nice but I did like one I had two weeks ago but I can't remember her name but it was really nice what she did 'cause she traveled a lot without money because of her job she'd go to Washington to SD and back and forth. She established what she actually liked was drawn so she started her own business and writing a novel which was cool cause she went from restaurants to writing a novel. She went through hardships like her divorce all those experiences they share with us really helps us with our enterprises.

Andrew: Being a young adult your enterprise can be hard to handle by yourself do you have family members or friends that have been supportive?

Monserrat: That's a nice question. At first my family was not saying why are you doing this you should be focusing on school you have college next semester and concentrate on what you're doing with your life what does selling hats have to do with your life and they're not gonna sell you bought a bunch of hats and cost us money and I said no mom believe in me but at first they were not very supportive but they like the class I was going to and learning more about life as an entrepreneur but they didn't like that I had to start my own business now and spend money and look out for people to buy my hats they didn't like that part so it was a little bit rough but my friends were supporters saying it was nice and they like them and share it with their friends and family and it helped to spread the word because of their support and now my family is more open to the idea and bought hats so yeah it was a little bit of both.

Bri: My question is similar to that and on the group support system what's your experience in getting a team together and getting support in a group and people you can lean on?

Monserrat: So we're a small class like 9 I think and everybody has different enterprises except for 2 groups of 2 where they share their enterprise and work together and lean on each other and then I'm alone but we're friends and talk but we weren't at first and just see each other every Tuesday. Now starting this semester and February we started to become more close and talk more and share our enterprises but also our personal lives and now I think we can lean on each other for example I have a friend and she told me that if you know anyone who needs makeup like girls going to prom who don't have money she will do it for them so I have a lot of friends and I'll tell my friends about your enterprise and you tell your friends so we share the voices and get around the word and if we need help we can introduce people and I have a classmate who was really excited and she said she met these people who might like our enterprise and she's really funny and really cute. we talk around and help each other.

Andrew: We've been talking about how social entrepreneurs and their struggles. What have you struggled with the most in your enterprise?

Monserrat: With my enterprise I've had trouble at the beginning selling hats because at first we had a pitch night where we [pitched our enterprise where we saw business people and presented a problem and how we were going to solve it and I sold 11 hats that night and I said what a great start! This is incredible! but you don't go to an event every week where you sell a hat and you might have a week where you don't sell any hats and you can get down and I have not anyone important that can help me with my enterprise this week and you can think you are doing something wrong but suddenly someone may see you in the street and ask about your enterprise and we talk about it and they excited and you give your business card and even if they don't buy the hat later because I got the chance to spread the word of what I'm doing which is what I'm trying to do I'm not only trying

to sell a hat I'm trying to sell an idea of you do you and I'll do me and don't worry about others defects like so what if someone is fat who cares worry about yourself so yeah that's the message I'm trying to give and work on yourself and let others be themselves and that's my message that I try to send out but if I don't sell a hat I do get bummed but I mean the whole purpose of my business is to help reduce judgment and if I get the message inside someone's brain then that's a win for me and that's how I get rewarded with myself and I'm happy that I did it because at least the person saw it but what really helps me is Instagram and has business profiles and you get to see how many people have seen your post or your profile or you hit your link and that really helps me cause I get a lot of viewers a week which is more than the followers I have but I think that those viewers that I get a week get to see a picture where I have an inspirational message about not judging people and working on yourself and my posts are actually reaching people and if I don't get to see it personally I get to see at least people read it and it'll be there in their minds that they will not judge people so yeah but it is pretty rough for my enterprise to get to sell hats cause I've already sold my hats to my friends so I don't know who to sell hats to. But I get a lot of help from Sarah at WIT because we have events where we get to engage with important people and other family members of the people in WIT and those are the people that buy and they engage personally with me and they see what my project is and say they wanna invest and buy a hat.

Bri: That's really cool!

Andrew: So you'd say your struggles stem from actually selling the hat but the most important part is people receiving your message.

Monserrat: Yeah that's what I'm going towards and at the beginning I was like I have to sell hats but then I realized it's not the hat it's the message not the actual hat and it got into my heart and you have to sell the why of the hat and not the hat itself.

Bri: That's very true

Andrew: How much do you sell a hat for?

Monserrat: \$20 which is not cheap but most hats are \$20

Andrew: Is there anything else?

Bri: I don't think so you answered all of your questions thoroughly and thank you.

Andrew: Yeah thank you!

Monserrat: Thank you!

Andrew: I think that just about wraps it up but yeah thank you for making the trek out to see us.

— End of Transcription —