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PROJECT- CLIMBING THE LADDER: BRAZIL TO U OF I

Interviewee: Carla Da Silva
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This is an interview with Carla Da Silva for the Latin American Immigrant Stories Oral History Project on stories about Brazil and Latin Americans' connections to the U of I.

S: That was a time when Brazil was going through, It was, there was a military dictatorship in Brazil from 64 through 85

P: Now what exactly do you mean by military dictatorship?

S: Yes, so it was a time that south America, it was a time of the cold war so the world was divided between the communist and US basically so there was this fear of the communist taking over the poor countries as it had happened to Cuba for instance. So there was this fear south America would become Cuba. So long story short, many countries were really stopping any leftist movement of the people to change the government against the elites. They use this excuse, in my opinion, of fighting against the communist, so that the elites could become even more powerful or that the military could take over the government in order to stop the communists. So, it happened to Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, they were very famous for military dictatorships in the 60's and 70's and it happened in my country too. So, one thing that happened, although having a military dictatorship is horrible, is that they were building a lot. They wanted my country to like modernize the country so it also implied building roads, building dams, I dunno, building everything. And my father was in this field of civil construction so for my father specifically who was not involved in politics who was just this blue-collar person who was trying to have a better life for his family, but for my father it was a good time because it helped him to ascend socially. My father made it to the middle class because of that. He became a minor partner in a company so he bought his apartment; it was probably his mid early 30's. He had his car, he had a telephone line. Not many people had telephone lines at that time. Eventually he got a beach house. So nothing was luxurious nothing as like the best of the best, but we had, these are the signs we made it to the middle class- my mother didn't have to work and after starting the middle school we started studying in private schools. So we had all these signs of moving to the middle class so I think this time of historical change and economical

change in Brazil helped my father make it to the middle class versus I dunno if my father was trying to do it now. You know I think the historical moment was so appropriate it helped my father because at the time because of the military they were building so much.

P: So I think in general the military dictatorship actually benefited you and your family way more than you know anything else...

S: I know it's a horrible thing to say because you know the military were horrible, they tortured people. My country was under censorship and people died and disappeared. But this is the irony and the paradox of everything that happens in life historically. Good people suffer and good people are also benefited in crazy different ways. Ya, so I think I also talked you before the other time we talked about another thing about my parents. They had very little education. My mother didn't finish middle school, my father didn't finish elementary school. They gave importance to education of course. That is another item that is important to the middle class but I think they learned on the go what was important for their kids bc they came from a background from people that didn't study much because they couldn't because I dunno the schools were very far and my brother and I were enrolled in a public school in Brazil and that was good, it was a good public school. But in Brazil the best schools are private school, they are better than public schools. Usually when you belong to the middle class, on of the... great part of your income goes towards education for your kids so I think they saw their neighbors, their friends, their kids would go to private schools, they would go to certain private schools. You also had to choose what kind of private school you're sending your kids to. And I think they realized oh I have to do that to my kids too. I think so it's also their understanding of the importance of a good educational background for their kids. They also learned on the go when they were having more money, more assets, and going up the social ladder.

P: So that was definitely very influential in your educational experience, I feel, it seems if they hadn't made the move up the socioeconomic ladder then you, there are chances you may have not ended up here today.

S: Exactly, exactly.

P: You know, I feel that your parents had a strong influence, even though it may be indirect or even subliminal, it was a really strong influence.

S: That's true, and there is another sign of belonging to the middle class. Usually the children go to language institutes to learn English. That's another sign of being part of middle class. This is before globalization. Now everybody wants to learn English. But before, and I liked music, I liked film, so I was interested in that too. I think I was also influenced by my parents because I was more driven to learn. My brother, not always, my brother was maybe more into sports. But I was more interested in learning so I would ask my parents to enroll me in a

language institute so I could learn English better because English at school was very basic, more for reading. I wanted to learn and understand music and the film so I think that's one more thing because I became fluent in English and eventually I started teaching English.