

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
MS.0404

“PG”

Interviewed by Annie Tang

April 20th, 2018

Johns Hopkins University  
Oral History Collection

Interviewee: "PG"

Interviewer: Annie Tang (AT)

Date: April 20th, 2018

AT: This is Annie Tang interviewing [PG] on April 20th, 2018 at the Eisenhower Library for the first-generation college student oral histories. Where were you born and please tell me a little bit about your family?

PG: I was born in Fresno, California. It's a metropolitan city inland of California. It has a population of around half a million and so it's a pretty big city, but the neighborhood that I grew up in – there were a lot of immigrants coming from different places, but mostly from Mexico. It was a very ethnic neighborhood and just being around people of the same culture, it was very humbling to just experience that. That's a little bit about my neighborhood and then the second question was talking about my family?

AT: Yes, tell me about your family.

PG: Both of my parents are undocumented immigrants. They are both from Mexico and so they come from a small state called Oaxaca. And even within Mexico, Oaxaca is a very – one of the less economically well states in Mexico. They also came from very rural villages. They did not come from very good upbringings even within the standards of Mexican living. They came to this country for a better life and they had me as their first child. They probably had me near their wedding. They conceived me near their wedding and then they had me nine to ten months later. Because my mom told my dad you have to wait, otherwise – she's a very independent person.

AT: Your parents were very honest with you.

PG: It wasn't necessarily like that before, but I think just coming to college and me showing that I want to know more about their history and what they went through. I think they recognized that and so that's why we've been more open in our conversations—but

going back. My dad is three years older than my mom, not that much older. They're both from Mexico. When they started out in Fresno, they first went to Fresno and that's where they met. Then my dad first worked at a landscaping gardening business and then my dad worked under a housekeeper—a cleaning business. They both working labor jobs, that didn't really require much education. With that being said, they did their best in terms of providing for myself and my brother. Now they do own their own companies, but it's still within their housekeeper, gardening specialization just because they've been working in that for years now. But they own their own company now.

AT: How does it feel to have undocumented parents?

PG: Recently I've been thinking about it more just because now that I'm graduating, there's just so much more that we have to consider. And so, I'm glad to say that they're coming. I had to clear stuff with TSA because I guess it's – it is a national organization, but depending on which airport you are at, they have the TSA officers may follow protocol or may not. Fresno is a very ethnic city, so rarely do they do anything with ICE. Rarely do they report to ICE because people travel domestically with just their Mexican embassy—

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I don't know what it's called, but the Mexican travel passport, I guess. That's one factor that I had to consider with them going to graduation and at some point, I thought maybe it's not worth for them to come just because I'd rather have my parents here than for them just to experience a very precious moment. But then at the same time, maybe not for the rest of my adult life. It was definitely something that I had to consider, but I'm glad that I talked to the TSA people and they reassured me that nothing would happen if they just did it from Fresno. That's what they're going to do. So in terms of just general Hopkins education, I think there's just a lot of factors that come with having undocumented immigrants and especially if they didn't really come from privileged backgrounds. There's just a lot of – lack of privilege that I had to experience during Hopkins, but I just had to adjust. It was a difficult process, but the important thing is that I grew from that. And so, through adversity there's strength.

AT: Going back to your parents, what was their highest education?

PG: Both my parents ended with sixth grade Mexican education. Yeah, sixth grade education level.

AT: Was it public school education?

PG: I think so, but I'm not really sure. I think it had to be public school just because private schools, they're a lot more expensive. But even so, my mom and dad told me that you had to pay to get into middle school or something like that. I don't know how it is in Mexico, but they just told me that if they wanted to pursue past sixth grade, their parents had to put in some money and that just wasn't possible with them just because on my mom's side, I'm not sure what their business was, but it wasn't enough – my mom would tell me the stuff that she would eat during her childhood. A lot of the meals didn't have meat. She's alive now and it was enough to [nourish] her. Some things I just take for granted, meat to eat during dinners or lunch, or having manufactured toys. Even when I was a child, I didn't really use toys, but my brother did. It's very different from the toys that my mom used to play with. She had to make her own toys. What was the question?

AT: It is somewhat related. What was the highest level of education of your parents? But actually, I was going to –

PG: Can I just finish up with that thought because it was –

AT: Oh, yes, no worries.

PG: With that being said, I learned my Spanish through them, but then I think because they only reached the sixth-grade level, my Spanish was also limited. When I wanted to develop my Spanish skills, I wanted to take a Spanish class here. It was just difficult because my professor thought that I was more advanced based on my accent, but my grammar was just very, very rudimentary. It's just very interesting to see that yes, I'm an English speaker, but then at the same time, I'm not at the grammar level that a native speaker should be. That comes from my parents not going beyond a sixth-grade level and just it's very interesting just to see the different levels of lack of privilege that I had to experience.

AT: You would say your Spanish is at the level of what sixth graders would learn in Mexico?

[0:09:59]

PG: That's the grammar that my parents learned, yeah, and I would say mine was – I didn't retain everything that they knew. Mine was probably less, but through the Spanish courses that I took here at Hopkins, I was able to catch up essentially because my professor thought that I was a level that I wasn't. And so I just had to put in extra work.

AT: You talked about your mom's childhood. Do you know anything about your father's childhood?

PG: Both of my parents when they were children, they would – I think it's called grazing the cattle or something, where you basically make sure that the cattle goes from place to place and while doing that, they eat the grass or pasture that's available. A lot of the times, they told me that instead of going to school, they had to do that in order to support the family because they would sell that cattle to people who wanted it. It's just very different from the childhood that I experienced. Both of my parents' childhood history isn't that –

[Audio paused due to noise disturbance.]

AT: So, the interviewer would like to apologize. She mentioned that we are interviewing JC today. Actually, it is PG. Apologies, PG. We were talking about PG's parents and I think he would like to talk about his father right now.

PG: With my dad, they – like I said, they both didn't have very great childhoods. Their childhoods also include a little bit of trauma within it, but with my dad, he was a single child. His father left their family when he was eight or nine. And so while he was growing up, he had to take care of his mom, but then also his half – so the relationship between my dad's mom and dad is complicated because they got divorced, but then they got together with a different person. Even though my dad's a single child from that family unit, he has half-brothers. Even though my dad doesn't really have full brothers or sisters, he does have a half-sister that he's pretty close to and he also has a first cousin that he considers his brother. Even now that first brother is in Fresno with us. We always get to hang out with the rest of the family and whenever we get together, they always re-spark old memories. It's nice to also hear my dad's childhood from them, too.

AT: What made your parents immigrate to America?

PG: They gave me the general cliché answer, but I think it's a very good answer just because the living centers that we live now, even though I consider my family low income, it's still day and night to the type of lifestyle that they had before. With my mom having to play with dolls or my mom and dad not really – not having the ability to eat to the point where you're full, just eat to how much you can bear.

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It was just a very difficult lifestyle and they wanted something more for their children. Back then, it was a bit different in terms of less restrictive and there was also just a craze within Mexican residents thinking that America was a place of opportunity. Now it's a little bit different, but yeah, I think back then, there was just putting America on a pedestal and with so much opportunity. My parents wanted to take advantage of that for their prospective children.

AT: Let's go back and talk about your parents' occupations. You talked about your father's business. What does your mother do?

PG: Both of my mom and dad have businesses. My dad has a business of gardening and landscaping, and then my mom has a housekeeping business. They both have one other employee. It's not just them, but it's still a relatively small businesses, but it's better than having to work under someone. They always stress that, that they were their own boss, and love what they do. Sometimes I'm amazed at how much they love their job just because I consider it very hard work. My dad, when I was little, he would want me to help him and sometimes it was obligatory, but I'm just really glad that he did in retrospect because it just taught me the virtue of hard work and work ethic. Whenever I think about that, it always humbles me. Whenever I think about a Hopkins student, I wonder if my dad's clients ever think oh, his son is working for him and when would a Hopkins student ever do manual labor like this. Because their dad does – that's what he does every day.

AT: Did you ever help your dad out in the business?

PG: I did. I don't know if I made that clear, but when I was around – my dad started asking me to help him when I was around 14. Since when I was 14 to I would say junior year of high school, I would help him every other weekend or something like that. Sometimes I didn't want to.

AT: You've talked about your parents and working for them. Could you talk a little bit more about Fresno? You said it was very ethnic.

PG: The neighborhood that I was in was very ethnic. I looked up Fresno a month ago. It's 50 percent Latino Hispanic. I was just amazed that oh, wow, half the city is Latino. You could definitely see it when you visit just because there's – at night, there's taco stands a mile away from each other. I think that's why my parents stayed there, because there's just a lot of culture there and even though it's not Mexico, they still have a sense of belonging there because they have family members that live there and because there's a lot of Mexican culture within Fresno. Also, it's just a better living style and so a better lifestyle. I think those are the three reasons why they stayed, and I think Fresno, even though it has many of the same problems of Baltimore when you compare it to Baltimore, it's just a different demographic. During my time here, I recognized wow, I wouldn't consider Baltimore that different from Fresno other than the demographic.

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AT: You said you were the oldest.

PG: Yes, I don't think I mentioned that, but I'm the oldest of three.

AT: Can you talk about your siblings a little bit?

PG: I'm 22. My brother just turned 21, so he's 21, and then my younger brother is 7. There's a big age gap between the second and third. It's interesting with my second brother just because we grew up together and we're just very different people. During my early years, I would've liked for him to be like me. I would – like, "What are you doing? You should try harder in school. Do you not want a good future for yourself?" I was just going about it the wrong way and so at some point, I was like, he should just live his own life. I do want the best for him, but then I don't want to be so pushy. I don't think I would say I gave up on him, but I think I just took a step back and just said I'm going to wish the best for him and be supportive of whatever he does, but just not be so overreaching into his life.

Ever since that, our relationship has been much better and now – so he's in his third year at college. He's going to Fresno State and he's majoring in business. He wants to do something in the business industry. I'm really happy for him. He also told me that he wants to go to grad school. I'm just really happy that it worked

out. Sometimes I do blame myself for not being the most supportive brother, but I think I'm just really glad that things worked the way they did and that my brother has a good future ahead of him. With my third and youngest brother, he's seven. He's in first grade or second.

AT: I think second.

PG: Yeah, probably second. My mom always mentions the things that he does. He seems very bright. It's interesting with him just because his older brothers are way older than him. It seems like it's an only childhood, even though he has two brothers. The two older brothers are just doing our own thing, and then my brother is there with my mom. It's interesting to see that, but then at the same time, when we are all together, it's a very nurturing environment.

I'm really excited for my youngest brother's future as well just because he also seems bright. Before he would be a little bit like a brat, I would say, because he's an only child. The way that the family dynamic is he wants to receive most of the love and then when I would come back home, he would have to compete with my mom and dad's love. It was just very funny just because he would get jealous over my mom hugging me – but he knows that I'm not there. It was very interesting to see my last visit. We just got so much closer and it was very nice to see him give me a hug when I left, when we were at the airport. We got really close this past winter break. I was going say something else, but I forgot.

AT: If you remember, you can totally bring it up again.

PG: What was the question?

AT: The last question was just about your siblings, what they were like.

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PG: With the individualistic attitude to put a positive spin, I think with my little brother, he would need a little bit more pressure to doing his homework with my mom. The different experiences that my mom had with each one of us is very interesting just because when I grew up, I was very independent. I would do everything by myself. I would never ask my parents for help. One because I knew that they wouldn't be able to help me, but then two, I guess I grew up with a sense of I can do this on my own. And I think that was a defense mechanism that I had to generate in order to navigate the landscape that I was in, but now I know the importance of support,

having a support network. I think it's just having that balance between being independent, but then also relying on that support network when you need it. But going back, so when I was growing up, I didn't really ask my parents for help. Then I would always do my homework on my own volition. But with my little brother and with my second brother, they would need some extra pressure. But then now, my mom was telling me that my youngest brother now gets excited to do work. It's good to see that progression of curiosity towards learning.

AT: Moving on, what was high school like?

PG: I think everything is hard to describe before college just because I didn't really find myself before college. There's just so much that I learned during my college years that now I'm just such a drastically different person than I was before college, pre-college. But with that being said, I think high school was a very positive experience. I loved it. I was doing well in school. I put myself out there. I won the homecoming prince freshman year.

AT: Homecoming king?

PG: Prince, yes, for freshman. It was for freshman year. I put myself out there and it was a very fun time for sure. It was a much more simple time because the public high school, I don't think it's ranked at all. That's just a drastic change hearing the types of schools that the Hopkins students go to, but it wasn't very well resourced. But I took advantage of whatever they had and so I put it upon myself to take as much AP classes as I could and be as competitive as I could while still enjoying the typical high school experience, like prom and high school dances and football games. I still talk to my closest high school friends.

AT: What extracurriculars did you do during high school?

PG: I was part of the Doctors Academy that they had in high school. It's a pipeline program that they have to nurture high schoolers who are interested in pursuing medicine, to help them find internship opportunities, shadowing, and exposing them to the world of medicine.

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I was also part of cross country and track, and I was part of runners club. I was president of runners club and it was basically cross country inside of school, but it was a fun time. I made friends

within cross country just because it was a very supportive environment and it almost felt like we were a family. That's where I got some of my best friends from, including DA as well.

AT: Going back to your parents, your family, what were their thoughts on education?

PG: Even though they didn't really have the opportunity to pursue education, they always told me that if they had the chance, they would have. When I was growing up, my dad would always say "Tu deberías termina tu educación porque no quieres hacer lo que tu mama y yo hacemos para trabajo" or something like that. That basically translates to you should finish your education because you don't want to end up doing the type of work that your mom and I do. I took that as two things. I took that as an economic sort of reason to pursue education, but then also to pursue education just because it's going help me, but it's also going to help my family as well in terms of going through the experience of the education system.

My parents also learned with me, and my mom and I always joke that we didn't really know what college was. She didn't really know what college was and so whenever I would go to meetings regarding college, we would both learn. It's been a growing experience for all of us and I'm just really grateful that my mom has been there every step of the way, taking me to meetings just because – I think because I was able to take full advantage of the college meetings that they would have at elementary and middle school and high school, that's why I was so set. Both my mom and I were set on the idea that I was going to go college, and then my dad – like I said, with that phrase that he would always say. Those two things definitely nurtured me to be so driven to the idea of college.

AT: Great. Speaking of college, how did you decide to attend Hopkins?

PG: When deciding [on] college, I was deciding between Hopkins and Berkeley. With Berkeley, they were actually offering me a really good scholarship. I forgot what it's called, but it's a really good scholarship where they paid full room and board and tuition minus your expected family income. And since my EFC was zero, they would've paid everything, but I got the Gates scholarship. Money wasn't really a deciding factor for me. It was more so what do I want to do for a career and what school is going be able to nurture me the most. There were two things that drove my decision. One was Berkeley not really having a medical school and Hopkins did

have one, and also Hopkins is very known for its medical school. At the time, I thought Hopkins would have more medical opportunities for me to pursue.

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Keeping that in mind and keeping in mind that I also wanted to be a doctor, it was the right decision in terms of which school was going to have more medical opportunities for me to take hold of. The second factor was that you rarely hear of people from my high school going to schools like Hopkins. People did go to UC schools like Berkeley and UCLA. I asked my teacher and they said have you heard of anyone else going to Hopkins. It was a relatively new school. When I went, it was only 12 years old and since opening – so when I graduated, it was 14 years, but it was a relatively new school. I asked one of my professors have you heard of anyone else going to Hopkins and they said no, people have gone onto Harvard and I think Yale, but it wasn't for a STEM major. In that way, I was able to pave my own road to pursuing some type of career.

AT: Describe the moment you received the acceptance letter from Hopkins.

PG: When I learned, it was through a website. It was an online acceptance and so when I was checking Hopkins, I already knew that I got accepted to Berkeley. It wouldn't have meant the end of the world if I didn't get into Hopkins because I just had a really good option with Berkeley. And they're both great schools – but I was still excited regardless and I invited my mom into the room saying oh, I'm going to check my acceptance letter. We both – I clicked the button and then it said accepted, and it was just a very nice moment. The moment that was more humbling was the Gates acceptance, but that's another thing. I wanted the Gates scholarship more than Hopkins just because I didn't want to be a burden to my parents' finances, but –

AT: Let's talk about the Gates. It was the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

PG: Yeah, Gates Millennium Scholarship.

AT: Can you talk about that more?

PG: It's a scholarship for immigrant citizens or residents, I believe. You have to be Pell grant eligible and it basically pays for room and board and tuition at any respective accredited college that you

go to minus your EFC. And my EFC was zero so that meant that the scholarship would pay for everything. With that scholarship, it was just knowing once I got it – okay, so when the Gates sent the letters, I was visiting Hopkins for the SOHOP days. I already knew that I got accepted to Hopkins and so I was making my decision between Berkeley and Hopkins. At the time, I was thinking about Berkeley just because Hopkins wanted me to take out a couple of – \$2000 to \$3000 each year for loans. It’s not a lot, but then at the same time, I didn’t want to do that to my family or myself. At the time, I was thinking more towards Berkeley, but then – so I experienced SOHOP and I really loved the experience that I had. Then on the night that I came back, my mom told me that a letter from Gates was sent to me. I said, “Don’t open it. I want be there when we open it.”

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The night that I came back, I asked my mom. We came into the house and I asked her “Where is it, where is it, where is it?!” She showed to me and then I was like, “Oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh.” Then I opened it and then I told her that I got accepted. And then we jumped up and down, and it was just a very exciting moment and emotional moment. We both cried, and it was very powerful and very precious.

AT: Yes, because you got 100 percent of your schooling paid for. That’s great. Well, congrats. I know it’s been a few years.

PG: Yeah, thank you.

AT: You chose Hopkins. What were the first few weeks of your undergraduate experience like?

PG: During my first few weeks, I’m [getting] used to the idea of going to a new environment and starting new. That idea I wasn’t really nervous of and so I liked the idea of getting to know new people and getting to know a new environment and just striving in it. But I think because there was just so much opportunities, I just didn’t know what to pursue. Then it wasn’t until my first exam that I realized that I wasn’t as prepared as my other peers. During my first exam, I realized that wow, I really need to change the way I study. Otherwise I’m not going do well and so I ended up doing top 20 on the final, but it just took a lot to get accustomed to socioeconomic privilege and the resources that they had at their high school. It was just hard not to suffer from impostor syndrome and I just had to learn to believe in myself and believe that I had a

different and unique narrative that most [at] Hopkins don't really have. Now I can say that, with that being said, I'm doing well, and it just took a while to get accustomed to the privilege that I'm always surrounded [by].

AT: You said your experience was unique. Have you met any other first-generation students?

PG: Yeah, definitely. During the first few days of Hopkins, I actually went to a JUMP retreat. JUMP is Johns Hopkins Underrepresented Minorities in Medicine or something like that – in Medical Professions, or something like that. That's where I found most of my closer friends and a lot of them, they're either first-generation or are low income or have another underrepresented intersection that that they have. It was a very supportive environment and it was nice to be surrounded by peers that were like me and who had the same interest in medicine. I'm really glad that they do that because that's definitely one of the factors that made me want to stay here at Hopkins. It made me feel at home.

AT: That's great. You've mentioned that you're interested in medicine. What is your program of study and how did you choose it, and what makes it so valuable to you?

PG: I'm studying molecular and cellular biology, and I'm going to be receiving a B.S. this May.

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Why I chose it? Even during eighth grade in middle school, I always had a keen interest in science. In eighth grade, my physical science teacher made us write an essay and I decided to write an essay on Stephen Hawking's book *Nutshell on the Universe* or *Nutshell of the Universe* or something like that. It was a very dense book. I don't know how I got through it. I just picked and chose a few chapters to write about. With that book, he makes it very – it's not what you expect in terms of being very complicated because in that book, he compacts it into a very easy to understand way of understanding physical laws. Because it's called *Nutshell* for a reason. He makes it so that the reader can comprehend. I'm sure I know a lot more now than I did in middle school. I would probably only not even picked up the bare bones of the book, but it was just very interesting to try to comprehend the whole idea of aging less when you space travel or the differences between black holes and quasars and pulsars, and why is the death of one star different from

the other, and how does that generate different outcomes whether it's a white dwarf or a black hole or a brown dwarf.

It was a plethora of information and proceeding to ninth grade, I had a biology teacher that had such a passion for biological topics. I just loved learning from her just because her passion – I could feel her passion for biology and it just made me want to closely read the biology book that she gave us. Knowing why there are more colors to a molecule when it's cold or something, or stuff – topics like that, I wanted to know why is it that – how do neurons work and how do they transmit signals to each other. But now I know that I didn't know – now I know so much more, but just starting from eighth grade and starting from ninth grade getting exposed to my curiosity in science definitely made me realize that even though I excelled both in math and science, science, for me, I was so much more passionate for it, specifically biological sciences. That's why I chose molecular and cellular biology. And then the third question was how does it –

AT: How is it valuable?

PG: How is it valuable? I didn't really know the value of it up until – okay, well, so I chose it because I wanted to be a doctor, but then also because I had a passion for biological sciences. But I think what made me truly value the degree was last spring semester and then this year because we got into – more into the how do you generate an experiment, how do you answer a question that you have, and what would be the necessary experiments to test sufficiency or requirement. Just knowing the pillars of how scientists come to the outcome of their accepted hypotheses – it's a very valuable skill set to have, especially if you want pursue research.

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And if you just want to even read research articles, which doctors do. Also, PIs and PhDs, but also just being a doctor, every doctor should value research because that's how we get different types of medicines. Also knowing what we know about the body, we get that from basic mono-organisms and so it's just very interesting to see how genes and knowing the genes of the thorax or another part of the segment of the fly leads to knowing about Hox genes in mammals and in animals. I don't know, just appreciating research and just appreciating the fact that a lot of our biological information comes from basic mono organisms.

AT: I can tell you're very passionate about it, about learning about it. I'm going to take it in a slightly different direction. What has been your dorm and apartment life like?

PG: Freshman and sophomore year, I didn't really have an option. During freshman year, we could rank, but that didn't guarantee that we got the dorm that we wanted. For the sophomore year, it was a complete lottery. Once given the lottery number, then you can pick and choose, but since I got a lottery number towards the latter, I didn't have much choice. But for junior and senior year, luckily for Gates, I was able to choose where I wanted. I'm just really glad that the scholarship allowed me to not even worry about rent or food and just focus on my studies.

AT: What was living in the dorms like, and living in the apartments? Did you make friends with your neighbors or have roommates at all?

PG: Yeah, so for my freshman and sophomore year, I had roommates. For freshman year, I chose [a] roommate. For all years, I chose my roommates, but for freshman year, I didn't really know him because we were both incoming freshmen. We got introduced to each other in Facebook and so I knew a little bit about him. Now we're close friends and so I'm just really glad that we were able to stay friends even though we didn't get to continue being roommates. We still consider freshman year a very good and happy time because there were no issues of, "you're waking me up or you're staying up too late," or just typical issues that come with roommates. It's a very difficult type of relationship to be in just because you have to be respectful, but then also pragmatic and diplomatic about what you want.

AT: What about apartment life? What was apartment life like?

PG: Much, much better, especially because I had my own room. Even though I don't study in my room, just having my own space just lets me be me and not having to worry about looking at YouTube music videos at 1:00 a.m. in the morning or just doing whatever I want or just watching a scary movie and not having to worry about screaming or gasping. Then having to wake up my roommate. I think just having my own space allows me to just enjoy being alone.

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- AT: You mentioned JUMP. What about any other activities or clubs that you've joined at Hopkins?
- PG: I'm also part of LEM, the Latino Pre-Health society here, and that club is mostly focused on having a supportive environment for Latino pre-meds, but then also we try to give back to the community. Through community education and volunteering at Latino clinics. Ideally, I would want to be more involved in policy and more systemic changes, but that can wait. I want to do it and I don't want to wait, but it has to wait if I want to be in a situation – where it is the best situation for me in terms of education level and knowing about the structure of the health system before I try to change the system.
- AT: You want to be well prepared.
- PG: Well prepared, right. Then another activity that I do is called Baila. It's a Latino dance club here at Hopkins and so we definitely get down and groove [laughs] and get groovy. But it's actually funny because before I joined Baila, I dreaded the idea of dancing. The only reason why I initially joined was because the idea of dancing intrigued me. Not necessarily that I liked it, but it intrigued me and just being exposed to other Latinos here at Hopkins also was [an] appealing factor. I like to say that I grew to like dancing because before, my mom – whenever there was a family party, my mom would be dancing, and I would be inside the house. Then my mom would come into the house and drag me to dance with her and go out and go to the dance floor, but that now, she doesn't even have to ask because I just enjoy dancing now. I've learned to love my body, too, love the way I move with my body and get accustomed to my body. Working out also helped in that respect, but yeah, both – all these activities helped me shape to be more confident in myself.
- AT: Moving on from activities, we're going to talk about professional development now. What sorts of jobs and internships have you had during your years here?
- PG: Most of the development that I had, I would say either came from research, holding a research position at the medical campus. Going to conferences and also having mentors that helped me navigate pursuing medicine. With research, I was a research assistant at the Devreotes Lab and we mostly focused on chemotaxis, which is the migration of cells due to a concentration gradient, and how that may apply to how perhaps if you change an upstream factor above – in the beginning part of the pathway, how you might change the

way they travel and how that might apply to different systems, maybe cancer. With the conferences, I attended some through the Hispanic Scholarship Federation.

[1:00:00]

They held STEM conference, which I got to be acquainted with different Latino college students that are also pursuing STEM fields. It was just a very inspiring moment just because you see all these driven students and they also are Latino and may also face the same struggles that you face. Yet they're all thriving in their own respective college campuses. Then I also just went to a Student National Medical Association conference with SNMA, and it's supposed to be a minority association – medical association for medical students and pre-meds. That was a very life changing experience because I got to meet with medical school officers, but just being surprised at who I was able to network with and connect with, especially if they are at the three medical schools that I want to go to. Just getting the contacts that I got was a very instrumental step to becoming a doctor.

AT: Other than these professional development opportunities you've been doing over the summers and breaks, have you done anything else, such as go home during your break times?

PG: Yeah, so I go home three times. I try to go home three times a year. One for summer, one for thanksgiving break, and then one for winter break. For summer, I do go home, but then sometimes I do something else, do an internship program or do volunteering. Other times, I just relax and then unfortunately this past summer, I got really sick due to a chronic illness, so I had to – this time, I had to just relax and focus on my health. But it's always really nice to go back and be in the presence of my mom and dad, and just enjoy being in the presence of each other and living off of the here and now with them. Then I'm just really glad that we all got closer because – so I would like to pride myself in being more emotionally open with them, and I think – like saying I love you and saying a little bit more personal stuff that's going on with my life. They saw that and recognized that, and then even my dad now says I love you, too, son. That's something that within the Latino culture, you see emotion as a sign of weakness. It's very nice to see my parents reciprocating the emotion that I give them.

AT: This actually relates to you expressing yourself with your parents. How has your relationship been with them for the years at Hopkins? How have you communicated?

PG: Most of our communication has been through phone calls. When I do go back, I'm with them, but for most of the time, I either call my mom and then I ask her to pass me to everyone who I want to talk to or sometimes I call my dad directly. Sometimes when we have more time, we can do FaceTime, which is much better, but it's just updating my parents about how I'm doing and if I'm going out or not.

[1:04:59]

I always tell my mom and dad when I go out and when I plan to drink. They always tell me to take control and don't drink more than two shots, but I try to listen. But yeah, just being very open with them and just telling them if I'm not doing well and telling them why or when I plan to go out. If I'm struggling with something, maybe have a perspective from them and also just hearing how they're doing, too, and how the rest of the family is doing. In terms of our general relationship, it has improved just because I mentioned before that we wouldn't really – so two things. The first is being more emotionally open to each other and then two, developing my Spanish so that I'm able to have a more rigorous discourse with them and being able to convey my emotions and express myself better. I can accredit those two factors as to improving our relationship between us, and then now we're even more close than ever.

AT: You don't have to answer this if you don't feel comfortable, but you mentioned that you have a chronic illness. Would you like to talk about it? If not, that's also fine.

PG: Just going through Hopkins, sometimes I'm amazed at how much I had to go through to being able to do well here. Having the chronic illness, it started last year and at first, I didn't really know what it was, but later they told me that it was ulcerative colitis. The initial diagnosis, it was trying to make sense of the urgency and being flustered that the first medication that they gave me wasn't working that well. How perhaps going through that chronic illness may affect the way I feel and how that definitely affects the way I perform at school. Then sometimes it also works directly to school just because of appointments and procedures. I think just suffering through chronic illness has been one of the factors that I just had to deal with. It's unfortunate, but at then at the same time, with each struggle that I have to deal with, with each identity that I have to bear, it makes me stronger.

AT: Moving on beyond the topic of your health, what has it been like living in Baltimore and Maryland?

PG: It's unfortunate that Hopkins students don't really get to explore much of Baltimore or Maryland other than Charles Village. That's probably due to the culture, but then also something that the administration could do something about. I don't think that the curriculum allows us to have much time other than education and studying. That's part of the reason why people don't really venture out, but also the other factor is just the negative stigma that there is stories, Baltimore crime rates. Of course, it's high, yes, but then at the same time, that shouldn't be a reason to venture out during the day. All you really have to do is try not to go out at night and just be smart about going out.

[1:09:59]

And not going by yourself or just being smart about it as opposed to fearing venturing out to Baltimore just because it is a bad neighborhood or known for suffering from crimes.

AT: With that opinion of Baltimore that your peers should go out more, have you had some favorite places in the city that you've gone to?

PG: I'll just name the neighborhoods that I've been to. I've been to Hampden, to Towson, to Federal Hill, to Fells Point, and to the Highlandtown area. I think it's called Highlandtown. My favorite place, you said?

AT: Mm-hmm.

PG: I don't think I can choose, but either Towson or Inner Harbor, Fells Point, or Highlandtown. Towson because it's something that everyone's comfortable with and we can all hang out together. Inner Harbor because it's just a really nice area and you can see the water. Fells Point because there's a lot of clubs there and I don't really go out much here in Baltimore. I actually go out more to D.C. because there's more Latino clubs there, and then for Highlandtown just because I only went there once. I went to a Hispanic church and the service was in Spanish. It was just very cool to see – feeling at home while – and I do consider Baltimore my home, but just feeling more at home and being exposed to that type of little niche that Baltimore has. It's really cool.

AT: We know that you want to be a doctor in the future, but what are your immediate academic professional plans or other plans after Hopkins?

PG: I got accepted to a master's program at Duke. I'll be doing that next year and then the second – so that's my first gap year and then the second gap year, I would be either doing research, either basic or clinical, or doing some type of community advocacy, which I've done before, but I haven't done recently. I feel bad about that and I would want to do something with that. Either option would be good.

AT: What's the program at Duke?

PG: It's called the Master of Biomedical Sciences. It's called MBS and I'm really excited to attend it.

AT: Congrats on getting in.

PG: Thank you.

AT: What would you recommend, or rather would you recommend Hopkins to other first-generation students? And what kind of advice would you give them?

PG: During my early years, I thought about what would happen if I chose Berkeley over Hopkins, but now I don't look back because just the amount of growth that I've experienced. I'm very proud of and now I'm so confident in myself and just the progress that I've made and believing in myself is invaluable. Just seeing the journey of overcoming each interstitial identity has been humbling. That's the first part. The second part is what advice. Coming to Hopkins or choosing a college?

AT: I'll leave that up to you.

PG: I'll answer it by saying maybe what to consider in a college, but then also why I love Hopkins and how to thrive. You should definitely choose the one where you think you would feel most at home.

[1:14:58]

I think you would get that feeling from visiting the campus and just talking to students. And whatever factor is most important to you, choose that in your admission – in your choosing process, whether

it's finances or prestige or curriculum in your intended interest. For me, it was mostly how they would tie into my future career. If that's something for you, you would choose that. But the reason why I love Hopkins is because yes, it's difficult, but it's had so many opportunities to let me grow in my many different interstitial identities. Although it was very hard just going through that process, which was just the counseling center, or OMA, the cultural center here, or other different organizations that you may have an affinity towards. Just learning what activities gave meaning to me, give meaning to my life, and pursuing those. That's what made Hopkins such a great experience and Hopkins just has so much opportunities for you to take advantage of. It starts with knowing what opportunities there are, but then not feeling ashamed of taking advantage of the counseling center because there might be stigma with that. Or reaching out to friends if you're going through a rough time and then also just taking advantage of the academic opportunities and the research opportunities that they have just because it's a place full of educational opportunities. And there's just a lot of bright people here and it's amazing to be part of such a dynamic and intellectual community.

AT: All right, we are at the last question of the session. How would you summarize your time at Hopkins? After all that summarizing you've been doing [laughs].

PG: In one sentence?

AT: Yeah, go ahead, if you want. If you feel too restricted by that, say a little more than that.

PG: I want to say difficult yet transformative and it also allows for growth. I don't know how you would connect both sentences, but –

AT: I think that's great. I think that's honest and it summarizes what your time has been here. Thank you so much for interviewing with us today and –

PG: I actually have one –

AT: Do you have one more thing to say? Go ahead.

PG: I'm also part of the LBGQT community and it's just interesting to see how many different intersectional identities I have and how perhaps sometimes they might conflict with each other, but I'm just really glad that everything worked out and despite me not

having a lot of privilege. Hopkins has been such a great experience and it's definitely allowed me to grow in ways that would've not been possible. I'm just really glad to have had such an experience.

AT: That's great. I'm glad for you. Any last words?

PG: I think you were concluding.

AT: I was concluding. What was I saying? Thank you so much for interviewing with us today.

[1:20:00]

And again, this interview is with PG, interviewed by AT.

PG: Thank you so much, Annie.

AT: You're welcome.

[1:20:12]

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