

[Episode 16 - A Conversation between Two Sisters - Christina & Valeria Che]

(Christina) Good evening. Here I have the lovely Valeria.

(Valeria) And here I have the lovely Christina.

(Christina) How are you doing this evening?

[Laughter.]

(Christina) okay, Valeria, when did you first like science?

(Valeria) I started liking science in high school. I don't remember liking it much in grade school. In high school, chemistry and biology went well and I think it's because I liked the teachers. I didn't find it difficult. That's when I started getting into the sciences. How about you, Christina, when did you start liking science and math?

(Christina) I started liking science in high school. My first science class was biology and it was fun. The dissection of frogs was cool although it smelled awful.

(Valeria) What did you like about your biology class?

(Christina) There was a great environment. The instructor was enthusiastic. We did a lot of labs. Mostly, the instructor was supportive.

(Valeria) I like how you mentioned a supportive environment. It was hard to find one in my immediate family or the teachers I had.

(Christina) Do you mean your mom and dad when you say "immediate family"?

(Valeria) Yeah. My mom and dad weren't very supportive at all. Wouldn't you agree?

(Christina) I agree that not having supportive parents makes the learning process difficult because without a supportive environment, especially in high school, one can lose interest very quickly. What about math? When did you first encounter a supportive environment around math?

(Valeria) I did about three years after going to Cabrillo College. For those three years I did not find a supportive environment either because I wasn't looking hard enough. It took me awhile to realize I did have a supportive

environment I could go to and that would be the Mesa or the MLC. I did not realize those existed for some time. Did you ever fail to realize there was support for mathematics?

(Christina) Yes, that happened. Not until about the Fall of 2013 when I walked into The Mesa at Cabrillo College did I run into a supportive woman, named Sue, who showed so much interest in my well-being. That was enough to make me want to succeed. She was the only person to ask me about my day and my class. Asking me those questions made me want to talk more about my day and my classes. Sue created a supportive environment that made me want to continue with math and succeed for myself. Sue helped me realize the only person who matters in my education is myself. She was so supportive and so I was able to continue on. I started in Math 254, basic mathematics which deals with the order of operations. Now I'm in the third series of calculus. Without Sue, I don't know if I'd be here.

(Valeria) Talking with our mom about school, she really didn't care whether we got a good grade or not. We didn't come home and show her our report card. Mom just expected us to clean first and do homework second. Homework was not a priority. It was nice having Sue ask about tests and know what was going on.

(Christina) Did you get feedback from Sue as I did?

(Valeria) Yes, it was nice. Sue was interested in the horror stories of math or exciting news. She always knew what to say and she was there. Even though our parents weren't present in our educational lives, it's okay because we found it somewhere else. I'm the older sister of the two of us, but I needed Christina to push me. Christina was the one who thought I could succeed even when I didn't. She was and is my role model. It was nice having my younger sister believing in me and being alongside me. She knows that.

(Christina) That's very true, Valeria. Having you there was great because you see me as your role model and I see you as my role model. It might sound wonky because we're siblings, but we both support each other equally. We don't have a great support system at home. To our parents, school doesn't matter as much as having a clean house. Our high school experiences with science and math was very difficult. I was fortunate to find an interest in biology, but when I got to chemistry stuff got harder. Because there wasn't a lot of support around that class, I lost a lot of interest. As far as college?

(Valeria) How many years did it take for you to get your ball rolling with math, class, and studying?

(Christina) It took me about four years after high school before I was able to even participate or act like a college student. I didn't have the most basic skills, like note-taking, reading, writing, and critical thinking.

(Valeria) Yes, critical thinking is hard because we didn't have discipline or encouragement to think critically. You don't do that daily, but now it's expected of us in math classes and we're working hard for that.

(Christina) Yes. You mentioned it is expected to be able to understand or at least being willing to break your head or struggle. You think one would go through that in high school, but it took me almost four years to become willing to go through the struggle. It took me four years to meet Sue, and when I met her she created an environment that felt safe and supportive. I felt comfortable telling Sue I got a D on an exam and ask her what I could do. If I felt down on myself, Sue told me ways to improve without telling me I was dumb.

(Valeria) So besides me as your role model, do you think Sue was also another role model of yours?

(Christina) Yes, Sue is definitely a role model who helps me strive and better myself.

(Valeria) Now that you're bettering yourself, what are your aspirations?

(Christina) My aspiration is to become a college math professor at a junior college.

(Valeria) A junior college like here at Cabrillo?

(Christina) Yes. One day I would like to teach here at Cabrillo, at the community college that helped me grow up and be the person that I am today. I want to be able to give back to incoming freshmen who are just like me essentially. I came in because that was the next thing to do and not because I had any idea of what I wanted to do.

(Valeria) My aspirations are to graduate from a four-year university. That's it. That has been my goal for a long time. I'm still here at a junior college working towards that because it took me so long to find a support system that told me school was important. Math was the last thing on the list that I thought I wanted to do.

(Christina) To this day having a support system at home is still lacking. I am still having to explain to my parents how important school is to me. School is not a topic spoken about at home because of the disinterest it has. Lack of support creates a big struggle in a lot of people's success in the sciences and in general.