

Bianca Melendez:

(music)

JANET WEBER: This is *Journeys of Learning*, where we talk to students that have taken unconventional pathways to reach their educational goals. I'm Janet Weber, and I'm your host. I'm a counselor at De Anza College, and I created this pod cast so that students will feel less alone on their own journeys of learning.

I am here with Bianca Melendez, and I start each episode by telling the audience how we met.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Okay.

JANET WEBER: And I first met Bianca when I was interviewing her for an internship position, and she did an internship for 1 year at Foothill that turned into 2 years, 3 years --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: 2 or 3.

JANET WEBER: 2 or 3? And she left as a full-fledged counselor --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yea. Woo hoo.

JANET WEBER: -- in the Disability Resource Center at Foothill College. You are now a counselor at De Anza College.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yep.

JANET WEBER: From there, I'm going to let you

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take it over and tell us about your background.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: All right. My name's Bianca Melendez, like Janet said. I was born and raised in Stockton, California which is about 45 minutes south of Sacramento. So it's northern California. I was born and raised there, and I moved to the Bay Area when I was 21. What brought me out here is I was transferring from community college in Stockton. I went to Delta College. I was there for 3 years. I thought I would be there for 2 years, but I was there for 3. They call it a 2-year school, but it's not a 2-year school; right? It depends on you, your journey, like, are you going part time? What's your major? So we don't have to get too far into that. But --

JANET WEBER: I do like that you bring that up --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Okay.

JANET WEBER: -- because I know you're along with me where you hear from a lot of students that they feel the pressure to finish in 2 years.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes.

JANET WEBER: And a lot of us do not finish in 2 years, and it's not a bad thing.

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BIANCA MELENDEZ: Right. I think it's actually, like, a good thing. Like, I feel like I was able to learn more about myself, what I really wanted to do --

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- what I thought I wanted to do, and what I ended up doing. Like, that time for growth and whatnot, too. You know. Young adulthood is a very complicated thing now that I'm, like, close to 30, and my students are the -- are ones right out of high school. I have, like, a 12-year gap with them now.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I feel like I'm coming out of young adulthood. So it's interesting to give that advice, like, to my younger self and, like, it's okay. Like, I have wisdom now. I can tell you that this is how you think things will go, this is how they might go.

So just a little bit more about, like, my background. Stockton, California is very different from the Bay Area. I had a good childhood. I had, you know, my mom and my dad, my brother, we were a close-knit family. My dad did not grow up with a dad

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so he was very present in our lives so I'm very fortunate for that and, like, for my mom. But I grew up in a different place compared to where with I'm at now. So I feel like it kind of opened up a new world for me moving -- because it's only, like, an hour and a half away from, like, the area that I'm now. But taking the time that I did in community college and moving when I did at the age of 21 -- which can be a fun age for a different reason [laughing]. Um, but I feel like I was, like, grown up and ready to, like -- I moved out here on my own. I didn't know anybody. I just happened to meet somebody at orientation when I was transferring and she looked familiar. She ended up going to the same community college as me, and we moved in together.

So I made that conscious decision back then, like, I know I'm from this small place but, like, I want to get out of there. Like, I want to go -- it's not like I moved across the world or across the country, but I came out here on my own, and that was, like, the best decision that I ever made, like, to spread my own wings, get out of my parents' house. My parents are great, but there comes a time where you're -- like,

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it's time to just be on your own.

And then I was at San Jose State for 2 years. Those were good years? In 1 way. Not so great years depending on how you look at it. The girl I mentioned that I met at orientation, 2 days before my senior year, like, my last year of my bachelor's she said she couldn't afford rent anymore and that she was moving out. So I was kind of, like, stranded in a way, like, I had to figure out what I was going to do. I couldn't find a roommate in a week because you have to give 30-day notice before you move out. Long story short, she moved out, I had to move out as well. So I commuted my whole last year at San Jose State --

JANET WEBER: Wow.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- from Stockton to San Jose. I commuted the whole year, but that first semester just so happened to be the 1 where I chose to take a 7:30 in the morning class with my roommate who was also a psychology major. So that was kind of audiocassette toward, like, seeing her in class and stuff.

But yeah. I would wake up at 2:45 to wake up just to make sure my eyes were open enough to drive because I had to get myself to San Jose State. Before this

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COVID world where we're able to do things through
Zoom --

JANET WEBER: I know.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I never reflected on this stuff
for a while because --

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- I hasn't thought about it.

JANET WEBER: Yeah. That's interesting.

Nowadays you would of just rolled out of bed and gotten
online at 7:30.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: We live in a different world
now. This is 2014 just for context. I would just eat
a little bit, try to wake myself up -- I was not hungry
but just eating kind of, like, woke me up a little bit.
I would hop in the car, and I would sit in traffic.
The reason why I woke up so early for my 7:30 class
is the later you wait, the more traffic that builds
up. So I would just try to go earlier than I needed
to. And I would get to San Jose State, I would sleep
in my car for, like, 45 minutes to an hour, and then
I would go to class.

Anyway. I did it first semester, and it was not
fun, but I told myself when I left community college

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I was, like, I don't care what happens to me, I'm finishing this in 2 years. Like, I'm doing this.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I know that kind of sounds counterproductive to what I was saying earlier that you don't have to do it in 2 years, but this was, like -- just for me, myself, like, I'm going to finish it. I don't care what happens, and you know, adversity happened. Like, things happen in our lives that could knock you down. Like, I could have dropped out and said yep, I can't do this. And you know, sometimes there are good reasons to drop out and come back the next semester, but I was very determined and I did it. And it was, like, this running joke that I was, like, this is my baby. I'm going to get my bachelor's. Bachelor's is my baby. I just looked at it in that way.

So yeah. I finished. It was a hard year. It was not fun commuting. I feel like I had no time for anything literally. I'd waste, like, 4 hours on the road. But I got it done, I made it work. I was applying to grad school during that time as well because I started that next year 2015. So I got my

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bachelor's in psychology, did the master's program at San Jose State, the Educational Counseling Program which was awesome! And that's how I got connected with Janet because I met Anthony, who is now dean at Foothill.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm. Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So crazy. So I'm so proud of him. I always tell him --

JANET WEBER: Me, too.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- I owe you, I owe you. So he was one of the first friends that I made in grad school. Like, the first day, first class. We were, like, sitting next to each other. Me, another girl, and him we were chatting, and then I found out he worked at Foothill and I was, like, oh, my gosh. I really want to get my foot in the door at a community college. That's, like, my ultimate goal. I want to be a community college counselor. Then we took classes together, he told me about the opportunity, and I applied, and I got it, and that led me on that path.

But during the beginning of grad school, as well, I had moved pack to Stockton; right? And my last year of my undergrad I needed to move back because I was

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going back to school that next fall. Like, I graduated in May, but right away for my master's program. And I didn't have anywhere to live yet; right? So I was commuting from Stockton to San Jose State during the grad program, too. I ended up finding somebody who was from my hometown and she was transferring to San Jose State. So we got connected and we ended up moving in together. But from July until, like, October of that year, I was also commuting. And I was, like, basically, like, homeless. Like, I would couch surf with, like, my friends in the Bay Area.

So my friends to this day because they were there for me during, like, a tough time because I didn't have anywhere to live. Like I said earlier, this wasn't COVID times where, like, yeah, just set up the camera and you can -- we'll record it or, you know. I was like I can't ruin my opportunity at grad school. I got to do what I got to do. My job was in the Bay Area, school was in the Bay Area. So I don't know if people would consider that homeless, but I felt homeless at the time because, like, yeah, I had a home with my parents, but that was an hour and a half away from my

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life.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And what I was doing, pursuing. So yeah. That was not fun. That was not a fun time. It was just like a rough whole year. Because now that I think about it, it was, like, October to October. Like --

JANET WEBER: What was it that kept you going through it?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I knew that I had to keep on going because for me personally and for a lot of people education was my key to success. We go generations back, my mom's parents are from Mexico. So my mom's first generation here. My parents did well for themselves, but they got jobs, like, in a time where, like, you can't have to have a bachelor's degree to get your foot in the door.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: You could get -- it was just, like, a different time. They were successful without having to go to college.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And so for me since I was little

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my parents would tell me you have to go to college. You have to get a good job. You have to have benefits. I grew up with my dad, like, drilling that in my brain because my dad worked for -- he's a sheet metal worker. He's retired now. But he was a skilled laborer and the union was like -- he was like, the union paid for your braces. And the union is why we have medical insurance.

JANET WEBER: Oh, interesting.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So it was very like -- my dad's very proud of that because growing up, he didn't have, like, basic necessities if you think about it. Like, going to the doctor, and having it be covered by insurance and whatnot. They were, like, you have to go to school, you have to get a good job with good benefits. Literally since I was, like, five years old I feel like I heard that the whole time.

JANET WEBER: That's interesting.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah. Just something I always knew that I was going to do. But when it all happened, being a first generation student, like, all these years, I'm going to do this. I have to do this. Like, there was no way. I don't know how healthy that is

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if you think about it. But my parents instilled it in me in a positive way.

JANET WEBER: What made it harder for you, then, for people like me, like, I grew up with parents that went to college, and all my sisters went to college. And you know, one thing that I've reflected on is that I grew up knowing what college was and kind of how you do it just through osmosis; right?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Mm hmm.

Is it was this thing that was always talked about that I was going to go do that my brother was supposed to do, and he didn't do it. I had an older brother. My parents instilled this in both of us, but he took his own path. I was just, like, a deer in headlights. Like, I was always going to do this but now I'm here, like, financially. High school helped us apply for that, like, luckily. They connected all of us to the different colleges that we were going to, but that's what I wrote my thesis about, too, is social capital. That's what that is, like, that social capital. You have somebody that you can go to that has lived it. Parents, siblings, or even people that you're surrounded with, like, family members and whatnot,

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too. You chat about it or whatnot. I was, like, the -- literally the first on my mom's side, like, generations back.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: On my dad's side, none of his siblings went to college, either. And I think some of my older cousins, but they weren't, like, close to me. They were, like, in different states and stuff. But I was, like, the first of many I think, like, the one and only on my mom's side. We don't have to go into details, but I had to figure out, like, I'm very driven. Like, if I don't know something, I would go find -- like, as intimidating as it was, just, like, higher education institution kind of like where do I go for this? Where do I go for that? So literally my counselor who came from a similar background as me I would see myself in her.

JANET WEBER: Your counselor at Delta Community College?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah. At Delta College. Yeah. That's kind of why. She was my inspiration. She made it, like, possible. I knew I wanted to go to school and get educated, and, like, get a good job

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one day. But if she could do it, I could do it. Like, literally her backgrounds, like, she was from Lodi which is the city over from Stockton. Humble beginnings. Parents didn't go to school, but they did well for themselves.

JANET WEBER: From what I remember she's the one that inspired you to become a college counselor.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes. When I first started -- so I want to talk about this, too. Like, it's okay to change your major. It's actually a thing. I have a lot of students that have, like, shame about it. I'm changing my major. I'm so sorry. Like, you have to redo my Ed Plan. They feel bad, and I'm like no. Like, this is great. Like, you're evaluating things. That's what college is about. Like, you need to see what's out there, be open, learn, see what you like and what you don't like. Because when you think you might like theoretically might sound good but once you're doing it, you might feel like that's not for me. And that's okay. There's things that I've done through school and I'm like yeah, I thought I liked that, but I don't really like that.

JANET WEBER: It's better to change now rather

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than later; right?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Exactly. After putting in all the time and energy and then you're in a career you don't like or a field you don't like. Sooner than later. But I thought I wanted to be at first a R.A.D. tech. Radiology technology and x-ray.

JANET WEBER: I didn't know that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I went to nursing, and I stuck with nursing for, like, a while. And at the time I didn't, like, realize it, but I definitely had, like, math anxiety bad. And nobody really talked about it. Even though, like, I was in school not that long ago. But nobody really, like, talked about it like they do now. I don't know if it's because I'm in the disability role because I'm a disability support Services Counselor at De Anza. Like I said, I don't know if it's because I'm in that world or if it's the time that we're in, too. I think it's a little bit of both.

I was doing, like, chemistry, and, like, all these classes and I was like yeah, this is not for me. And my counselor -- I was in her office crying because I was like I felt this is what I was supposed to do. I

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was so, so, so discouraged. Like what am I going to do now? And coming from my background I'm like I need a job, that's going to make me, like, good money, too. I'm spending money on school, but they don't have the Promise Program which is two years for free, which is awesome now.

JANET WEBER: Right.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I wish I had that when I was in school. I tell students all the time. That would have helped you so much so please [indiscernible]

Yeah. I was so discouraged and my counselor helped me to see, like, what is your main goal? To help people. I've always wanted to help people. So that's how I know I'm in the right calling. But she made it real for me that you don't have to be in the medical field to help people. There's tons of ways to help people. And then I took her equivalent of, like, her [indiscernible] planning at Delta College and I only took it as, like, the requirement for G.E., but there was a three-course thing through a semester school, like, three half units or something. So I took everything, like, self-assessment, career exploration where we did -- you interviewed people in

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the jobs that you think you might want. And I interviewed her for an informational interview. Because I was like I don't know if I'd be in education, like, I can make a lot of money. Not that the goal is to make a lot of money, but I don't come from money so I have to, like, build somehow some way.

JANET WEBER: Something stable.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Exactly. To where, like, I can live comfortably. That's always been my goal to, like, live comfortably. And so I was like I don't know if I want to do this. But you can ask people how much they make during the information interview and it's not like ooh, a taboo thing.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So she helped me see that I could help people without being in the medical field. I give this advice to this day; right? If students through, like, the pathway that I did where yeah this just isn't for me. I'm like that's okay. Helping -- that's actually a really good thing. I feel students in college want help. I'm like, it's okay. Like, you can do other things and let's explore that.

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So I changed my mind on my major, and that's the best thing I ever did. My counselor made this plan for me back in 2012 I think it was. She made, like, the whole plan to transfer to San Jose State, to stay there because they had the master's program.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So I did my -- my A.A. is in social and behavioral sciences, and then my bachelor's is in psychology, and my master's is in the educational counseling at San Jose State. She made that plan back in 2012, and I followed it.

JANET WEBER: You did it. You did it.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah. And I would email her, like, all the way. Like, I need to he mail her -- now that I'm talking about her, I feel I need to email her and be like thank you!

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: You know?

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I've checked in with her, like, I graduated, I did this, I got this internship, I got a part-time job, I got a full-time job, I got another full-time job. You know? So she -- I tell her I'm,

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like, forever grateful for her to just believe in me and give me the advice that I needed.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: You know? And that approach to, like, the first gen student. She had that kind of, like, I know where you're coming from, so let me help you. And I feel like I have that niche definitely with my students, especially who are first gen, like, I have a handful of them this year especially oh, my gosh I see myself in them so much.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: For various reasons. I know I'm still young but I'm, like, getting a little older in a good way. I'm happy about it because I'm gaining wisdom. Because before when I was really close in age with them, like, when I was 24, getting my master's, you're just a little bit older than me. Now, like, that 30 number is a little further. Yeah, I'm not that much older than you, but -- or I'll just give advice to whoever it is. That's kind of a cool thing in the counseling journey, too.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I'm giving these students what

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I needed. Not in a selfish way. It's not cookie cutter or whatnot. It depends on the student.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: We're talking about but I'm on your side. So it's cool how things come full circle.

JANET WEBER: Yeah. I was going to say you're helping people, which is what you wanted to do.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Mm hmm. And in, like, an awesome place, you know? I had always had a passion for, like, community college just because it's an open door for everybody. Its --

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Whole mission is totally, like, my jam. Because even for me something that I didn't mention earlier, like, background-wise, like, I wasn't four-year bound out of high school.

JANET WEBER: You weren't?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I struggled. Yeah, no. Like, with my math, I don't know how far this goes back, and I have never gotten tested for a learning disability, but I wonder if I have, like, dyscalculia. Totally hypothesizing here I don't know if it was math anxiety or what. If I look back, I struggled with math -- I

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think the only time I didn't struggle was, like, second grade. After that when things kind of got more complicated algebra and all that, I just wasn't the greatest. So yeah I was in, like, remedial math in high school. I had to really work to get to that point to graduate. Not that I wasn't, like, close to graduating. It was just, like, junior year my counselors were like okay, we need to make sure. And it was fine. But I wasn't four-year bound out of high school.

JANET WEBER: Even then you were so driven to, like, not --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Mm hmm.

JANET WEBER: -- quit education because it was hard for you. You kept going. You went to the community college, and you got through the math somehow.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes. Oh, my gosh. AB705 was not around --

JANET WEBER: That's right.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- for me, too. AB705 has to, like, really great benefits and some not-so-great benefits especially for students with disabilities,

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but to talk about one of the good things is you don't have to take that remedial math like we did. I had to do pre-algebra, algebra, stats. Regular stats did not go well for me. And then I did psych stats, like, Psych 15 on De Anza. And I got an A in that class because it was very, like, tangible.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: We were doing research, and median, and averages and all that. So I was not four-year bound out of high school. And I was almost ashamed of that because where the high school I went to, a lot of people went to, like, four years, they ended up back at the community college that I was at, too.

JANET WEBER: Oh.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah. But I would get, like, comments of oh, you're going to -- what did they call it? It was Delta College, but there's a Target right next to it. If you're from Stockton, you know. There's a Target right next to the school and they would say, like, C.B.T., like, college Behind Target or something behind target.

JANET WEBER: Ah.

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BIANCA MELENDEZ: That was, like --

JANET WEBER: Snobby people.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah, but it was, like, this kind of whatever behind Target, like, building behind Target.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I was, like, you know ha? I don't care. Like, I saw my opportunity, like, again that's why I'm so passionate about community college --

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- because that was the open door for me.

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I was not four-year bound and I was, like, this is my open door, this is my steppingstone, I'm going to make the best of it. Like, I have a second chance because, like, your G.P.A. like, starts over. High school's its own thing, too. And so I was just like you know what? That's okay. I may have messed up in high school. My grades weren't the greatest, and that's okay. Like, I feel like when I went to community college I had my job -- I was

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working 30 to 40 hours all through school. I don't think I mentioned that.

JANET WEBER: Yeah. Can you talk about that?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: That was not fun [laughing].
That one I, like, talk to students --

JANET WEBER: That's how you afford your living expenses.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: How the you do that? Yeah. I had to pay for my car insurance, my car payment, gas. When I lived in Stockton, I was living with my parents. I didn't pay rent or anything but that was how I paid for, like, food -- I wouldn't ask them for money but I lived with them.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So I was pretty much self-sufficient at 18, like, I was doing my own thing. I was living there, and I would eat food there, and I would pay for food when I was out, but yeah. That was, like, my living money. And I saved money, too, for when I moved for San Jose State. So I still took out student loans for San Jose State.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Like, my bachelor's and my

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master's and that was not fun.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: If any students are listening to this, do not take private loans because those will not be forgiven. I mean, I hope under this administration maybe that will change, but take the federal loans from your school so if you get a public service job after 120 payments you will hopefully have it forgiven.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: That's one of the biggest mistakes I ever made in school. But again, I didn't have anybody to go to ask for advice.

JANET WEBER: Right.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: So that's, like, one of my big things I tell students who come from a similar background where, like, your parents aren't going to pay for your school. You have to work, you have to -- it's almost like survival mode. Literally I was in survival mode for, like, seven years.

JANET WEBER: Wow.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I feel like that kind of molded me into who I am today. An anxious person

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because I was always very much what am I going to do now? What's next?

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: You know --

JANET WEBER: I think one thing that stands out for me is that you really believed in myself.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah, I did. And I still do. Which is ironic because I feel like I'm my worst critic but I'm also, like, my biggest hype person in the same sense.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I don't know, maybe that is just, like, anxiety speaking because, like, I know my worth, and I know what I can do, and I know that I can have things that I want in my life, but then I'm, like, really hard on myself. I don't know. I don't know. It's kind of ironic.

JANET WEBER: Aren't we all?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Okay. Like, now that I say it out loud [indiscernible]. My mom has always described me as a person -- like, the dog with the bone, like, if I want something I'm going to do it.

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh.

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BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I've always done -- I think it's, like, a personality trait for me. Even when I was little I was very independent. I'll feed myself, or I'll dress myself.

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: It is, like, a personality thing. But one thing -- so my parents couldn't support me, like, financially or with that, like, social capital, like, okay, this is how you do it. But they were very supportive. Like, when I changed my major, or when I did any of that, it was almost frustrating for me because I would be, like, tell me what I need to do. Or, like, give me feedback. And they would just be like, well, we're happy if you're happy. Just do what you want to do. They kind of just wanted me to go to school and, like, get a good job and whatnot.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: That's what they want was for me to have a better life than they did; right? Like any parent; right? And so they were so supportive in that way. Like, do what you want. We want you to be happy. But like I said, it was kind of frustrating

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because I'm like what direction should I go in? Like hello! But honestly, the -- I think that ended up helping me for the long run because I know that my decisions for me -- you know -- I mean, you have influences, but you know I do hear from some students where there's a lot of pressure from family or parents to not only go to school but, like, to pursue a specific major and if you don't pursue that specific major, then you're a failure, or you're this, or you're that, or you're not successful. So I am grateful for that piece.

JANET WEBER: They were emotionally supportive.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes.

JANET WEBER: Yeah.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: When it came to that kind of stuff. Yeah. And my parents are very proud today. So that makes me happy. I did -- like, school and all of this journey was, like, obviously for me because now I'm reaping the benefits of that, but it was definitely, like, for my parents.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I have to do this for them, I have to do this for my future kids, my grandparents,

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my family. Like, I'm not a statistic from where I'm from. Like, I'm a success story --

JANET WEBER: Yea!

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- from the city that I'm from. There's a lot of good things that come out of Stockton. I'm not trying to bad mouth Stockton, but it's not the greatest place to grow up, and it's a violent area. Things maybe have gotten a little bit better, they may have gotten a little bit worse there, but I am a Stockton success.

JANET WEBER: Success. You are a success.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yea! I can say that very confidently.

JANET WEBER: I can, um, second that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I just have to say I'm driven, and I've done the hard work, but when I went to Foothill and I met you, and Leanne and the awesome team at Foothill, not only have you guys helped me, like, professionally, like, to mold me into a great counselor and all of that but also personally. So I've been very lucky to have awesome mentors in my life.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

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BIANCA MELENDEZ: One good quality that I have is when I feel like that genuineness from somebody that, like, wants to help or is, like, speaking from the kindness of their heart not just telling me what to do -- because there is a difference. There is some people out there. But you guys really took the interest in me, and one of my good qualities is I listen. I don't know if you've noticed that --

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- but I listen and I take things to heart. If I trust you, I'm going to listen. And I've literally done everything that you guys have said. Seriously. Like, professionally --

JANET WEBER: So we molded you into mini mes?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes!

I'm so happy. Now I have my A.P.C.C. Associate Professionals Clinical Counselor, and I made that decision literally about to graduate with my master's. It was April and I went --

JANET WEBER: We forced you to the that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: It was, like, again, the best decision because I could have been done in May, but I did summer school and I was so bummed. Shoot. I

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just want to be done. You heard my story, my journey.

JANET WEBER: I remember that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And I was like I just want to be done so bad. I'm so tired. I'm just, like, I just need the summer. And I was like you know what? If this will help me long-term I'll do it. And I did it, and now as long as I get my hours and pass my ethics oral exam and all that, I can have my own practice. Or even, like, at De Anza in psychological services I can do, like, some therapy. So it's just opening up a whole other door for me either within or outside. Possibly having my own business one day. I never saw that, or even fathomed that. I followed my journey, but I've had, like, really good mentors in my journey and that includes you. So I have to give kudos there. Because some people could listen and they don't act on it. But I'm one of those people who I'll listen and I'll act on it. So it's a two-way street.

JANET WEBER: To the point where she would even listen to my recipes and, like, go home and make them.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Oh, my God. You have the best food, the best everything. And they took me to the ballet in San Francisco, the Cliff House when it was

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Still around. Just out and around. So you've helped this girl from Stockton who had never been to the ballet. Not just the Nutcracker, but to the real ballet in San Francisco. So --

JANET WEBER: And I brought the Stockton girl to the big city ballet.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes, she did. And I'm still learning and growing. It's still a journey. So I'm here for it. But I feel like the hard times make me stronger. As a I reflect on everything it makes me stronger. Like, when I would get knocked down and then I had to, like, get back up I'd be like wow. All those hard times prove to me how strong I really am. Like, if I can handle that, I can handle anything, you know?

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: And like I tell students, too, the hard times make you appreciate the good times even more. If life was perfect all the time, that'd be so boring; right?

JANET WEBER: Yeah.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: They build character, you learn, you grow.

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JANET WEBER: And they make you a more interesting person, I believe.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Mm hmm. Relatable.

JANET WEBER: I'm going to ask you my last question --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Okay.

JANET WEBER: -- which is: What advice would you have for the students that are listening to this?

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Believe in yourself. There's extrinsic motivation, and then there's intrinsic motivation. Everybody outside of you has it; that's great. That can help you, but your motivation needs to come from within to do what you want to do. So if you're lacking that motivation, it could be for reasons but, like, try to believe in yourself and have that motivation. See where you want to be, like, visualize, manifesting, speak as if they're already happening. So yeah. Number 1, believe in yourself, keep on going. If things knock you down, like I said -- I could have got knocked down a handful of times in my journey, but I just said I had to keep on going. It was, like, a survival -- I'll be honest it was like a survival thing. Like, I can't really just,

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like, not do this because I need to get closer to the end goal sooner because I have to fend for myself. So, like, there is no other way. But I could have gone another rout, but the tough times, they make you stronger, they build resilience. It's good to go through things. It's good to grow, and change, and learn from the hard times and even from your mistakes that you make. It's okay to make mistakes.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Right? You have to make your own mistakes, too. People can talk 'til they're blue in the face, but I feel like you learn the best when you make the mistake and try to, like, remedy that or grow from it. Ask for help. I will be honest, I didn't really ask for help at community college. Well, until I got connected with that counselor, but that was, like, the second half of my time there. Pretty standard, but you have to advocate for yourself. You have to say "I need help". And whoever you go to, your counselor, the tutoring center, wherever it might be as long as you put your hand out there, "I need help," they're going to grab it and they're going to help you. They're not going to,

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like, leave you hanging. And it's okay to ask for help. I know me being such an independent person, like, that's, like, my personality, I don't like to ask for help. But I know that I have to actively work at it and ask for help. It actually means you're a stronger person asking for help versus, like, you're strong because you did it on your own. So ask for help --

JANET WEBER: Yes. Thank you. See your counselor.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yes. See your counselor. Do not make your Ed Plans on your own. Go get that double checked. Even if things are going well. That's what I tell students. You take this follow up. Things are cool, awesome. If they're not, cool, we have the appointment and we can work out what's going on --

JANET WEBER: Mm, I like that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- check in, and, like, maybe we can have a quick conversation because usually, like, you're working on stuff; right? So it's, like, nothing's going on. We can just chat for, like, a little bit. We won't keep you the whole time. Just see how things are going. It's nice to hear the

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positive things, too. It's not always, like, oh, my gosh, this is happening, and you know? Like, we can have, like, a uplifting conversation, too.

Believe in yourself, ask for help, connect with your counselor, connect with the resources on campus --

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- especially at De Anza. De Anza students are so lucky. There is so much --

JANET WEBER: So much.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: -- so many resources and, like, good people working at these resources who are like we are here to help you.

JANET WEBER: Yes.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Especially where I work. I am here. You just need to advocate and be like hey, I need this. Once you're in with us, you're in with us. We make sure that you're good. And I can say that for all the resources.

And then another thing about work, you have to, like, evaluate this. I know some students -- and I was one of them -- you have to work to survive to provide for yourself, for others. Some students even

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have families, which is a whole other thing, like, props to all of you for balancing, like, kids, school, work, money. Just know that working a lot now, making more money now, might not be worth it. Maybe cutting back on your hours if you're struggling, so that you can do well and progress forward. Like, it's just a conversation that if you haven't already had it, have it with your counselor. I was really closed off to it when I was in school, but I try to kind of have students dig deeper about that.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Do you have to? Or maybe take less classes this quarter.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Because if you absolutely have to work, we work it out. But just have that conversation that work is kind of getting in the way of things. I wish I would have had a more in-depth conversation about that.

JANET WEBER: Yes. I agree. And we can help you with that.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Yeah. Exactly.

JANET WEBER: Thank you so much for joining me

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today.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Of course.

JANET WEBER: And --

BIANCA MELENDEZ: I feel like I was going on, and
on, and on so --

JANET WEBER: No. I loved it. I loved it. I
loved hearing about your journey.

BIANCA MELENDEZ: Thank you. Appreciate it.