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Normally, when looking to go to college you think of getting an education, but when I look back at my experience at CC, I like to call it becoming educated. At the end of our four years there, I remember my closest friends and I talking about our degrees, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, and Philosophy and thinking, “Ok, now what are we going to do?” Are these exactly marketable degrees? As first generation college students when the dream is that you get an education and get a career, you’re supposed to begin moving up the ladder of success. What I didn’t understand was that becoming educated at CC was much more than a degree.

My CC experience was a bittersweet wake up call to rest of the world. Coming from a small, largely homogenous, Latino, centennial town in Southern Colorado, prided as the Oldest Town in Colorado, I just knew that CC would be my beginning to conquering the world. I was Salutatorian of my ‘large’ class of 14, Class Vice President, member of Student Council, and yearbook editor. I was a cheerleader and played volleyball and the flute. It wasn’t only until I was asked whether or not I believed I got there because of Affirmative Action did I doubt my abilities, well-roundness and right to be there. I was intimidated from the get-go. I remember sitting in my freshmen orientation seminar and watching a film about the Tragedy of the Commons. In the discussion afterwards, as we sat in our typical CC circle, I remember hearing a ton of 12-letter words in the comments from the students around me and thinking, ‘Wow! Sounds like they have said a lot, but they don’t know Commons lands like I know Commons lands.’ They were talking about them like they could never work because of greed and that they were something of the past. But, I knew better. One continues to exist and thrive in my home town. I struggled whether or not to say anything. One of the other students there had been in Indonesia throughout her senior year. I had only been to Tijuana and Juarez once each on family trips. I didn’t realize you could actually live in another country for an extended period of time like that. Whatever the case, because my strong will overrode any insecurity I guess, I still told them that a Commons did exist and it existed in my home town. Little did I know that the student who studied in Indonesia was just as unsure as I was, thinking that she had missed out on her American education for a whole year and thought she might be behind. At the orientation luncheon, I was sitting with classmates and their parents and overheard one of the parents from back East comment that it was sad that this area didn’t have much history. Once again, I knew better. I just didn’t know how to explain to them that this area, particularly south in New Mexico had been explored and settled almost one hundred years before Plymouth Rock, and prior to that there flourished many nations with much history and culture.

I got asked about my identity from just about everyone from every race and ethnicity, including professors. My identity as Spanish raised a brow by many. One professor even asked if I thought Spain would claim me. Another Latino student a couple of years older than me asked me what I was and when I said Spanish, she said, “Is that why my hair and skin are lighter than yours? You people from New Mexico just want to act like you’re more European and better than everyone else.” As a freshman having been at CC for no more than a couple of months, my jaw dropped to

the ground and I was dumbfounded. What was she talking about? I wasn't even from New Mexico! I knew who I was...I lived and breathed my identity every day. I just didn't know how to explain it to anyone. Up to that point, I never had the need to. In a class a white student stared at me through my entire response to a professor's question and waited until I was finished to ask, "Where are you from?" I said, "Colorado. Why?" He continued, "Where are your parents or grandparents from?" "Colorado." I responded. "Well, your accent is so exotic!" Outside of class, no one understood my English peppered with Spanish. What? Not everyone speaks this way? And Latinos from other countries couldn't understand certain words that I used in Spanish either. At this point, I was starting to feel like I was on another planet and I was only 2 hours away from home! I was ready to leave CC and seriously considering a transfer to UCCS. So many people told me not to do it, but I just didn't feel like I belonged. Then, I met Johanna Leyba, a senior who took me under her wing. She said she recognized the look in my eyes and knew she had to step in to make sure I stayed – that it would be worth it in the end. Soon after, I met Colette from Walsenburg who talked just like me and I was introduced to MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) and found my niche.

We proudly marched on the streets of Washington, D.C. in solidarity with Latinos from every country across the U.S. I co-chaired MEChA the following year and the Gorman Minority Scholars Program, a big brother/big sister partnership program with one of the local middle schools. I became a work study for Rochelle Mason in the Office of Minority Student Life and stayed with her for 2 ½ of my 4 years at CC. I owe her much gratitude for the opportunity and support she provided for me, especially during my senior thesis time when I pulled all-nighters writing in her office! I wrote my first play in a Native American theater class and studied abroad for a semester in Spain my Junior year – something I suggest everyone do if they can. My semester in Spain was a priceless experience that opened my eyes and heart to the world in ways that no book or video can. I was part of committees striving to increase diversity on campus and helped organized many educational symposia sharing with others at CC the art, academics, music and heart of the various minority cultures represented on campus. I enjoyed the Baca campus and the CC cabin. I learned to salsa dance. I was introduced to interpreting my dreams. I went to my first hockey game and was hooked as we rallied for CC against DU.

In the end, CC opened up a new world for me, showing me the beauty of other cultures and the value of serving the community. I learned to be a better writer and a better listener. I learned perseverance and to always make decisions from an educated standpoint, taking in all sides before I make a decision. I also learned not to discount what you know and never to be intimidated by what you perceive others to be. I learned to ask questions. It took me a while to realize that that's how you learn. No matter whether you think your question might be dumb or whether everyone will think your question isn't valid. Again, it's how you learn. I overheard many questions in class coming from students in which I thought the answer was obvious, but my thoughts didn't matter. They weren't afraid to ask and that was what was important. They were learning despite my thoughts. I realized I had cheated myself out of learning many a time for fear of what others might think about my questions.

In addition, the seemingly endless questions, comments and assumptions about my identity also led to my quest and passion for genealogy and the identity of the people from my hometown, San Luis, CO. I have found the history of the people of San Luis so fascinating that I continue to work on this research fervently. Since graduating, I have also worked in nonprofits in every

aspect from Program Coordinator to Grant Writer and consultant. I received my Masters in Curriculum and Instruction from DU in 2006. I taught secondary Spanish for about 10 years for several school districts and through the Pre-Collegiate Program at CU Boulder. I worked for Regis University as their Program Coordinator and taught courses like Multicultural Perspectives and Foundations for Teaching the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse in their Master of Arts in Education Program. Most recently, about 6 years ago, I took on my toughest, yet most fulfilling job yet – mom of Darien, 5 and Kyara, 2.

Through it all, my “education,” from academic to social at CC has given me the tools to problem solve and the courage to envision the impossible and set forth to make it happen. They say that what you go through makes you stronger. I know it’s cliché, but I think back to my work with kids and teachers, and my current visions and dreams and the purpose in all of it is to help others find their purpose faster and easier than I did. So that when they pursue their dreams and others doubt them or they face similar challenges, their foundation is strong and they can answer the questions that I couldn’t. To me, this is how becoming educated has become much more than a degree. Help others to succeed. Leave things easier for the next generation to help them achieve even greater things. Know that learning is a process, always in progress. Overall, my CC experience was filled with great memories and learning experiences and opportunities. I will be forever grateful for the imprint that CC has left on my life.