

**Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County,
Illinois**

Tannya Sanchez Oral History Interview

Aaron Landis, Interviewer

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(0:00) Introduction

Aaron Landis (AL): Hello, my name is Aaron Landis, and I am interviewing Tannya Sanchez, or Tannya...?

Tannya Sanchez (TS): Alvarado.

AL: ...For the interview of the Madison County Historical Encyclopedia. We are going to record the interview, do you understand?

TS: Yes.

AL: For starters, tell me about yourself.

TS: Well, my name is Tannya Sanchez. I am 28 years old. I am from Ecuador. All my life, I have lived in Ecuador, except for the past three years. When I was in Ecuador, I studied English at the university and, in the beginning, I didn't understand anything when the professor would speak. Later, I knew foreigners and I suddenly wanted to learn more English and practice. Through this, I met my husband, who brought me here.

AL: Ah, OK. And your husband was a chatting partner? Was it an English practice [activity]?

TS: At the university, sometimes there are native speakers who come and give English classes for a while.

AL: Oh.

TS: And for maybe 6 months, I had a professor and—what was his name? Matthew Dropper. He lived in New Mexico, and—but I took classes with him for about 6 months, and I really liked the classes with him because he only spoke in English and he used to do games and make us speak in order to help me speak because it is difficult to speak in another language. But, I met my husband in a bar after I left the university, when I was doing my thesis. And at that point in time, I was already working as an English teacher in a school for kids in their first year, Kindergarten, 8th year. I went to a bar one day and there were three Americans speaking English, and I wanted to practice because my English wasn't very good at this point in time. And I was very scared to speak, so I needed to practice.

AL: Yes.

TS: And, hmm, I met him and simply said, “Hi, what’s up? I need to practice English.” I gave him my number, and since then... we are together.

(3:10) A typical day at school in Ecuador, her youth

AL: Yes. Despite having studied Spanish for six years, I still feel scared at times when I try to speak in Spanish because there is a pressure when you need to think about the perfect words to express what I want to say. So, tell me—or talk to me—about a typical day in a primary school in Ecuador.

TS: In primary school—let’s see if I remember—we take classes from 7 in the morning until 12:30 when I was in classes, but I believe the scheduling has changed. We have a main teacher that teaches us language, mathematics, history, geography... all these things, and there are other teachers for other activities. Mainly, I was very timid, quiet, and baby-faced, so they gave me more children than [laugh]...

AL: Right.

TS: ...Everyone took care of me, and I was much smaller and skinnier than I am now; I looked very weak. So, they looked after me, and I even had problems integrating into the primary school because I was a very little girl, and my mother put me a year ahead in school, so they accepted me with conditions: if I responded well in school, I could remain there. I didn’t have to wait a year, but... I never had a problem with this. [Laugh] I have always liked to study and learn.

AL: Yeah?

TS: Yes. We take recess—a long recess—of a half an hour.

AL: Yes, it seems to me to be... not parallel, but almost parallel, to the education in the United States in the primary school. It goes about the same. Were there daily activities that you used to do in school that don’t exist here?

TS: Let me think...

AL: Like dance classes, or culture classes...

TS: Ah, yes!

AL: There aren’t classes like this in the primary schools of the United States, but...

TS: I took embroidery classes—[in English] it’s like sewing, but when you make different things. It was an elective. I picked this class. I wasn’t very good at it, but I took that class. Also, we had a lab, and depending on what you wanted to do, I don’t remember the other options, but there were maybe two other options that one could choose from.

(6:50) Her family's influence on her studies

AL: Ok. And was your family involved in your studies?

TS: Ah, a little. In school, when you receive the list of school supplies, you are given new notebooks and, at the beginning, in the first page, you have to draw— [in English] we call—we called them cover sheets, and they have to be pretty, and I always like to have clean and pretty notebooks. [Laugh]

AL: Yeah...

TS: And my father is good at drawing, and he helped me with the cover pages for mathematics, language, for all of it. Those were my favorite. And for geography... I have never been good at geography, or history. None of it. And in Geography, when I was in high school, I had to draw maps of the entire world.

AL: No!

TS: Yeah, it was something like 50 maps in one week, have it all drawn. Because of that, I didn't like it, and father used to help me with those drawings from time to time. Most of the rest of the activities, I almost never asked for help.

AL: Yeah, it is important to know if someone's parents are involved in their studies because it can—I don't know—it can build character a bit. And, it's important, I think. So, tell me about your family.

(8:39) Her parents and her brothers

TS: My mother and father are both from Guaranda, where I am from. The two of them have—were born in 1959. I have a younger brother and a half-brother through my father. He is older than I am. My younger brother is 26, and my older brother is 31. He is studying to be a nurse; my younger brother recently graduated as an engineer in natural disaster response, in order to manage when there are earthquakes.

AL: Ah, okay. Yes, that is very important in that part of the world.

TS: Yes, in Ecuador, there are many earthquakes, so, hmm, he studied it and he liked it. He recently graduated.

AL: And, uh, just so I understand, your 26-year-old brother is an engineer?

TS: Uh-huh.

AL: Okay.

TS: He is an engineer. My other brother, the first, worked in the Orient for an oil company. He almost didn't study. Later, when he finished this, he began studying accounting, I believe. And later, he didn't like it either [laugh], and later began studying nursing. I believe he will see this one through [laugh].

AL: Yeah, I used to study electricity, like engineering...

TS: Electrical engineering?

AL: Yes. I began my academic career at the university with this choice, but after one year, I changed my focus--my major--because I didn't like to study it. It is very complicated.

TS: Indeed.

(10:55) Her life in the U.S., the barriers of her immigration

AL: Ok, so how long have you been in the US?

TS: Well, January will be 3 whole years because I came in January of 2014, but I had to go back to Ecuador to renew my Visa and fill out the school paperwork, I returned Ecuador for three months, and then in January, I returned and stayed.

AL: Yea. My step-dad also is an immigrant, but from Russia [struggle for the vocabulary word].

TS: Oh, from Russia [confirming the vocabulary word].

AL: Yeah, from Russia, and I kinda know that the process of immigrating to the U.S. legally is *very* painful.

TS: Yeah, it took me a year to come here.

AL: Yeah, as with immigration and this process, have there been other barriers for you in the U.S.?

TS: Um, when I arrived at the United States, my intention was to study at SIUE [Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville], but at the beginning, I believe they give a master's in English, because I have a title... [searches for the word in English) Bachelor?

AL: [Gives the word in Spanish] Bachelor's degree.

TS: A bachelor's degree! I forgot the word--a bachelor's degree--so, I already had a bachelor's degree in Ecuador. I wanted to get my masters, but because of the qualifications of the university, which weren't sure if my degree was accredited or not, they gave me some papers that... I presented them a paper, but they told me it wasn't sufficient, and to obtain more official paperwork from Ecuador takes a long time, so it was impossible. Because of this, I had to return to Ecuador, and--thank God--my husband contacted a person at SWIC (Southwestern Illinois College), and the secretary helped us and gave us a bit more time to present the papers there. I almost didn't make it into SWIC [laugh], so we did all the paperwork there, and thank God, I got in.

AL: Okay.

TS: And you have to pass the Duffel exam.

AL: I don't know this exam.

TS: It is to demonstrate--[in English] proficiency?

AL: [Gives a guess to the Spanish word] "Proficiencia," maybe? I don't know.

TS: Yea, I don't remember.

AL: Of history or of the language?

TS: Of English. Of English, yeah. There are certain levels intermediate and advanced, and you have to have a certain percentage to enter into the university.

AL: Yeah, that's right.

(14:00) What she likes about the U.S.

AL: So, what do you enjoy about your life here?

TS: Of my life here? There are a lot of opportunities, the salaries are better, there are more food options, there are more places to see... Where I live in Highland, it is very peaceful. It reminds me of my native city, even though my city has more things to do. It is quiet and safe, just like my city.

AL: Yeah, it is peaceful in the country here because... there is a lot of corn. So, are there activities here in Highland, or near to Highland, that you like to do?

TS: The Schweizerfest. Yeah, it takes place once a year, I don't remember exactly when, but we used to go to the--I'll call it the central park because in Ecuador we call it the central park, but you guys call it the square--there, there are lots of activities and people, like a fair, there is a lot of food, a lot of people.

AL: Ok. So food and music?

TS: Music, yeah. And also--

AL: Ok. Do they dance in this festival?

TS: Uh, Americans almost don't dance at all. [Laugh].

AL: That is completely true!

TS: Yeah, it took me awhile to get used to not dancing in festivals, but also, there is--one time or maybe two times each month--there is a wine store in the area, near here, and there they do a tasting and there are appetizers, and so we go, drink, and try wines, talk with people, listen to music. Sometimes, it is live music. We go out with the whole family, my in-laws, my husband...

(16:29) What she misses from her home

AL: How awesome. It seems really fun. So, what do you miss from your native city?

TS: From my city... I could walk wherever. Here in Highland, since it is a small city, the bus system isn't very good, and I have... before, I didn't have a car to drive and didn't know how to drive because in Ecuador, I never need to [laugh]. But here, I took two years to learn, and one time, I didn't have anyone to pick me up from the bus. It was autumn, I believe, yeah, and I wasn't--I was always seen with boots and tacos, and all that... I wasn't prepared to walk, and when I put in the GPS to see how far the bus station was from the house from the bus station, it was about 2 hours on foot. And in a car, it's 5 minutes.

AL: Yeah...

TS: There, there are no sidewalks to be able to walk safely and avoid getting run over.

AL: It is good to know how to drive, but I also get mad a lot too because there are many obstacles as there are--how do you say, [in English] "luxuries?"

TS: "Lujos."

AL: "Lujos," yeah! Okay, how has your life changed due to your experiences as an immigrant in the U.S.?

TS: Experiences... I believe I have matured a lot because when I was in Ecuador I always lived with my wife and always had them around me: my grandparents, uncles, cousins, all of them were around me. But, when I decided to move to the U.S., it was a difficult decision. When you come here, you realize you are alone. It teaches you to be more independent and to be more

careful, worry more about the people who say “hello, what’s up,” and all that, worry more about the university and your goals.

AL: I haven’t been separated from my family for 3 years before, but when I was serving in the Army, I spent 15 months in Iraq. So, I understand a little how it is possible to miss your family when you are very far [spoken incorrectly in Spanish].

TS: “Lejos.”

AL: “Lejos!” Sorry. So would you like to go back to live or visit your country?

TS: Um, I went this past July for my wedding, in the church. Because I got married quietly two years ago, yeah, more than two years ago. But I didn’t tell my family, because my husband wanted to be traditional and ask my parents, ask permission, to give me a ring, he wanted to do all that--beautiful, unforgettable. But, because of my papers, my student Visa was going to expire, so we decided to get married and begin the process to obtain a green card...

AL: Yeah...

TS: And this also took some time too. So, because of this, we decided to marry and not tell anyone. [Laugh]. And [inaudible].

(20:55) Marriage customs

AL: This is good, I think, because the process of getting married in the United States is very rigid. You have to--the men have to do certain things very specifically, like the ring should be--should represent a percentage of your salary, your income. And, it’s a really specific number, it’s a percentage, I believe. I don’t remember. I have forgotten already because I got married 7 or 8 years ago, but also, the man should request the permission of the father of the bride and get his blessing.

TS: Yeah, it’s the same in Ecuador.

AL: It’s a very specific and very rigid process and is very important in American culture. So, yeah, we don’t dance much, but also there are things like this in our culture--

TS: --Which are important.

AL: Yeah, which are important.

TS: Yeah, in Ecuador, almost no one wears a ring, so when I didn’t have a ring, I didn’t... It was the same because I never wear rings, but it is important to him, including changing my name. But, I didn’t change it yet because I still have to renew my green card in a few months, so I wanted to do it all at the same time, and not one thing on this day, another thing on that day. I

am waiting on that, but he--at the beginning, I said, "I can stay with my family's last name, and he said, 'NOOOO!'" [Laugh].

(22:49) Advice for immigrants, the future of her studies

AL: So, we're going to reflect a little bit. What advice would you give to someone who just arrived to the United States?

TS: Umm... that you learn English, that you know where some important things are, that you learn where to file your legal paperwork, umm... get your ID made, your driver's license... All the important paperwork that people have to do when they arrive all the time, make friends, don't be afraid to speak, look for work, study...

AL: Okay, so...

TS: ...and get a car! [Laugh].

AL: [Laugh] Sorry. You mentioned earlier that you are studying in school here from scratch?

TS: Yeah, I am going to begin.

AL: Yeah, I'm going...

TS: Because I began in SWIC [Southwestern Illinois College], when I met you, but I finished that already. But now, I have to begin my master's, or a bachelor's maybe? I don't know. In order to get my certification to teach. **(24:15)**

AL: Yeah!

TS: Yeah!

AL: I am considering being a teacher also. It would be simple, I think, with the bachelor's that I'm about to receive, but I still would need to obtain other certifications in order to be a teacher. There are--I don't know the name of the certification, but I would have to keep studying a bit.

TS: Yeah. **(25:00)**

AL: Okay, would you like to teach children, yes?

TS: Yeah, from elementary school. Now I am teaching children in Edwardsville at the YMCA...

AL: Ahhhhh.

TS: They are mainly homeschooled kids, children who don't study at school, but they have a community that's called... Oh my gosh, I forgot the name--but it is a community of children, and all of them meet at YMCA, and they have classes there in science. Some parents teach some of the classes, but for Spanish, I applied for a school called--a program for classes after school. It is

called Spanish School. There is a girl who used to teach Spanish at the high school, but she liked to teach the children more. It is a good program because it doesn't focus too much in grammar, so things are more toward immersion.

AL: Yeah, like conversation?

TS: Yeah, that, conversation, games, songs of TPR, stories with drawings, like when you're telling stories.

AL: Yeah. **(26:38)**

TS: So, the children like it and it's good for--and they learn more, I believe. I have realized that they learn more.

AL: Yeah. I think that learning is done through teaching because in order to teach, one has to review everything you already know and support it.

TS: Yeah.

AL: Okay, so, do you think you would prefer to teach in a private school or a public one?

TS: (27:28) I don't know. It depends on what opportunities there are. I believe that, as my husband says, I'd like to teach to anyone who wants to learn. As always, there are children that I am teaching currently, and they like to learn Spanish. They ask a lot of questions, they are more active, so I am more excited to teach more things. But when the children are without energy, they don't have any desire to learn, it doesn't matter to them that they are learning anything. It's like this give you a motive, they don't have the same affinity for learning, they don't have the same initiative--

AL: Yeah.

TS: --To learn. So, I believe I would like to teach children more. Because they want to learn.

AL: Yeah, they listen better in their youth, but when they become adolescents, they don't listen very well. [Laugh].

TS: Yeah. [Laugh].

AL: They become rebellious a bit.

TS: Uh huh. Yeah.

AL: (28:50) Yeah. Do you think you studied under a professor or teacher that inspired you to be a teacher?

TS: Hmm... I'm going to be honest. I always liked to learn, but I didn't want to be a teacher. I had another idea as I was studying English because I wanted to study international business, international relations.

AL: Yeah?

TS: And because of this, I wanted to learn English. For health reasons, I couldn't go to the university I wanted to. I had to remain in my city there, in the university there, and my mother suggested to me that I study English because I always liked it since I was little. So, I said, it's a good idea to combine [laugh] the two careers because my idea of studying was to do international business afterward. But this wasn't the case, and I finished coming here. Because of this, I am... but, yeah, there are professors that have made me see that it can be fun and it can be... how do you say [in English] What is the word?

AL: Interesting?

TS: Uhh... yeah, interesting, yeah. We can say that. I had really good teachers in Ecuador who loved their teaching career and always had that charisma to teach. But I've also had bad teachers who didn't care if you learned or not.

AL: Well, I have no more questions for you, so the interviews has finished. Do you have any questions?

TS: No.

AL: Well, thank you very much!

TS: Many thanks to *you*!