**Nara July 14, 2016**

When did you arrive in SF? How did you get to SF? Where did you come from?

I had just turned 16 in 2005 – that is when I arrived in the United States. I am now 27.

I grew up in Armenia, but grew up in Russia and in 2005, immigrated to the U.S.

I finished Lowell High and applied to City College and after that, I went on to a university path, and now I am in the workforce.

I had always wanted to get a college education – it was never a question, and I was determined to get an education in the U.S., a competitive education so that I could move on with my life and career and when I was in Lowell High School in general what I heard was a negative reputation about CCSF in general – about students, about instruction, and I did not succumb to that view and I wasn’t sure what it meant, and I always loved public education, and City College was the way for me to go.

I chose that path and it was one of the best decisions of my life – I can say that wholeheartedly. The instruction was amazing. I met dedicated and amazing instructors that I still love, remember and keep in touch with, and they all touch my heart and I think it’s special when you have someone like that in your life – and even comparing City College and later my education in Berkeley – City College definitely has a special place and City College for me was a foundational step. Even though I went to a good high school – it was Lowell High School in San Francisco, I did not feel that it has prepared us enough in a sense, for example, UC Berkeley was where I went, even in the English perspective, even though we had (at Lowell) great classes and great teachers, I felt that City College truly prepared me for college in Berkeley – writing, economic concepts and every class was instrumental in my success at UC Berkeley and beyond.

For me as an immigrant, I did not know what path I would take – 2 year or 4 year, and when I was in Lowell, I did not consider applying straight – many were applying to Yale and competitive schools, but I considered it to a small extend because everyone was talking about it, but I knew I wanted to go to City college first. There was just this determination there. I was basically having to rely on myself and knew that I would have to support myself through whatever decision I was to make. I wasn’t sure still to apply straight or not to a four year school, and I thought I would have to use more time to get acquainted with the United States as a country as well, and of course economically, I would be able to support myself through City College as compared to a four year college. I wasn’t sure exactly how I would work that out, but I hadn’t explored those options.

You arrive at CCSF in 2007. Where did you go, what did you do, where did you even start? Did you talk to a counselor? Orientation.

My major was economics before I came in because that was something I considered in Moscow where I grew up, so the first thing I did was visit a few counselors to determine what my academic plan would be and what classes I would need to take in order to transfer later to a four year institution. Counselors have been very helpful and I went through several of them and also through the transfer center who were very helpful to determine which classes I have to take and how it all works. I went through other counseling sessions like EOP counseling sessions (extended opportunity learning services), so I was utilizing a lot of resources on campus and learning about resources, academic support and academic planning.

I think by myself (finding out about resources) – by visiting different offices and trying out by myself.

I did not know anyone at City College – I was a total stranger at the beginning – I just took my classes at the beginning and I met my best friends actually at City College who I still keep in touch with and even transferred to four-year institutions with – so, yeah.

How did you develop a sense of community at CCSF?

First, it was a very diverse environment and people had not talked about that before in terms of CCSF – I had thought it was a homogenous environment. But, contrary to what I have experienced, I have so many diverse people from very diverse backgrounds – culture, socioeconomic situation and just a very multi-faceted background. So, I just developed friendships with a lot of different people from all over the world. Some of whom grew up here, some who did not – along with the Russian community as well, Russian speaking community. I became involved with clubs and different extracurricular activities on campus and that has helped me develop and expand my network and expand and broaden my relationships and friendships and give back to City College as a community.

What clubs were you involved with?

There were a lot of clubs I was involved in. One was AGS, and another was the business and technology society. I was also president of the EOP club that we had. There were much more. I wish I could remember. I was on the planning and budget committee, a subsection of student government.

What was your experience with instructors and how did that compare to your experience upon arrival at UC Berkeley?

I think City College instructors in my opinion, and I wholeheartedly say this, I think they are amazing people and amazing professors. They are so committed to teaching and not just teach because it’s their profession – but because it’s their passion. They are wholeheartedly committed to student success and they’re all well versed in their subject and they’re so knowledgeable. They are dedicated to their career and they love their work and profession because they wholeheartedly believe in what they do. They are passionate and well versed with great expertise in their fields and they always want to see students succeed.

At UC Berkeley, instructors are wonderful – but they do have a lot of research projects that they work on. They are very involved in their research projects that they have rather than teaching – I had a mixed feeling about it and I felt like all of the instructors that I had were very passionate and very educated in their field, but of course, with City College instructors they’re more approachable, they’re very invested—they have more time. Berkeley professors are amazing and wonderful – but they’re busy but of course, if you utilize office hours, they are always available for you and if you develop the right relationship that you would want to have, I think you’ll have the right opportunity.

Was it scary coming to CCSF at first? Being at such a big place?

I wasn’t scared, but I felt as if I would need to figure it all out by myself. It was a new place and I did not know anything about City College and I just decided to take it one step at a time, and gradually, I would accomplish anything that I could.

During your time, were you able to you gain confidence? Through club leadership?

I think CCSF has allowed me to expand my opportunities as well as build a lot of different leadership skills and help me to develop professionally and also academically in many different respects. Speaking up in classes and leading projects, being in group settings, being involved in honors program and doing research projects was one of the greatest programs that I was a part of. City College has so many wonderful resources – you just have to search out for them and talk to the professors to make them work.

How did you determine what you wanted to study?

I did not take econ at Lowell, but while growing up in Russia, within my family, we had decided that [economics] was a great path to take, and my mom was an economist – I was supposed to go to finance academy in Moscow so kind of like that step was predetermined for me and I was always interested in economics. I started taking classes while at CCSF and I had wonderful professors in statistics, calculus and economics and did some research projects – and it was such an interesting field. Even though I had a pre-determination about economics, I think taking classes at CCSF and doing research in those fields has helped me to find that for myself and settle on it for my major.

I heard about UC Berkeley when I first came to the United States, but it was out of reach for me. Just as thought, I heard no one could get in. I looked into other UC colleges, so I applied, and thankful to my education, academic background and leadership qualities, I got into every UC to which I applied. I only applied to UCs – “thank you colleges for accepting me – and I choose UC Berkeley for my top choice.”

What did you think at the point in 2009 upon arrival at UC Berkeley?

I wanted to continue with economics, but I also realized that I longed for more academic and writing and research, so I switched from economics to political economy later. Because that gave me an opportunity to do research and also apply economic concepts to it as well. I think it was a good decision because it gave me a lot of possibilities and learning more research, writing and doing more reading.

Berkeley experience was great – I enjoyed it. I commuted from San Francisco. It gave me great background and possibilities based upon my interest to continue academically and professionally.

After I graduated, I thought I might be going to law school – that was one of the things I was consideration. After graduating from college, I started working at a nonprofit and that’s how I decided I would switch my interest from law to something else. My first nonprofit job title was Work Readiness Instructor and Employment Specialist and I did some case management on the side as well. It was a nonprofit that provided educational opportunities in SF and with the immigrant population that come to the U.S. social services needed and help them to develop their language skills and employment. I was involved with Project Shine, a wonderful opportunity that I treasure to this day. At that nonprofit I was there for 2.5 years, my longest employment and after that I was working for the govt. for a human services agency, and now I am at the office of workforce and economic developments to do workforce development services in the city, so we are doing workforce development in four different sectors: hospitality, construction, tech and healthcare.

My title is employment liaison, but what I do mostly is work on development strategies and program development. We manage a construction training program called City Build here in San Francisco so we train academy students to be employed for the construction projects we have in the city and we have a professional administration program for those who want to be project managers and accountants on the project sites, so I do program development, academies, grant research, grant development, workforce strategies and communication – working with collaborators who want to develop leadership programs and just thinking of innovative things to help the population at large and of course, marketing communications.

We constantly keep exploring and make sure we provide the best technical training to upskill to train and employ the appropriate jobs and progress in a career, and not just a job.

Yes, I have always considered graduate school. In terms of opportunity, it is a difficult question and it has been on my mind for such a long time. Even in promotional trajectory, I don’t know how much is needed, and of course more training in a few different field. I think I have deviated from a law degree, but I have always been interested in business and economic business since it was my major and I’ve been thinking education, public policy and government. I am thinking about grad school, but I haven’t determined it yet, but it is very costly. I want to make sure that the education I get will be relevant to what I will be doing in the future and I want to supplement my career with the education I will be pursuing.

I have friends at CCSF and Berkeley and the CCSF friends – I made my best friends at City College, and we do keep in touch and some of them we went to college together and City College is and has been there and has been expanding -- [woman nearby saying she also went to CCSF].

How did City College shape you? City College has allowed me to search for opportunities and to learn how to do it myself and that skill has really allowed me to get acquainted and find my path at UC Berkeley and not be afraid to approach different people, including counselors to navigate your path and shape your career the way you want it.

What do you remember most about your time at CCSF?

I remember instruction. I think instruction is superb at City and as stated, how instructors are dedicated and invested professor who love what they do and want students to succeed. That is the pivotal moment of City College for me and that has shaped me as person, as a human being and as professional as well. And of course, the opportunities that I had with leadership roles and being involved in different community organizations and campus clubs activities and developing long lasting friendships.

It is unfortunate that CCSF has a stigma and as the school has gone through different stages in the last few years – to me, City College is instrumental and whoever I talk to and whoever goes through this experience all loves CCSF so much and this experience is treasured – and it is pivotal and it was a foundation in the United States – and again, I went to high school here, but I feel that City College was this rock needed in order to move on into the future.

I wanted to join the student government, but by the time I learned about it, it was too late.