

Transcript of Sonlatsa “Sunshine” Jim-Martin '94 P'19

Interviewed on July 23, 2018 by Chaline Lobti '19

Chaline Lobti '19: The first question that we're going to start off with is to get to know you a little bit more and hopefully get a better understanding to what led you to Colorado College. The first question would be, could you describe the neighborhood you grew up in, the schools you attended before coming to CC?

Sonlatsa Jim-Martin '94 P'19: Okay, you want me to describe the neighborhood I grew up in and the schools I attended before going to CC?

CL: Yes, that's correct.

SJ-M: Okay. Well, the neighborhood I grew up in is not a typical neighborhood that people think of in terms of a house and blocks of streets. I grew up on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico, and so I grew up in a very rural area of our tribal land. We traveled four miles of dirt road to get home. It's very rural and isolated. I lived with my relatives, my mom, my grandmother, and a few houses scattered around us, but you'd have to walk to visit anybody. For me, I grew up in a very isolated, rural area of the Southwest. Very dry, desert mesas. There's no traffic, you can't hear the highway, you rarely hear any police or any kind of city noise. It's pretty peaceful and quiet in terms of hearing the animals and nature around, and then an occasional car driving by. That's my neighborhood.

SJ-M: I grew up with an extended family, so not only did I grow up with my sisters, I grew up with my cousins and my aunties and my uncles. We did grow up in poverty. We didn't have electricity or running water when I left to go to school, to CC. We actually didn't get electricity or running water until recently, maybe about 15 years ago we got running water out here. But when I left to CC we were very poor, and we were still using kerosene lamps to do our homework. Let's see. I grew up with a single parent, and grew up in a traditional Navajo family. Not only did I have the opportunity to speak Navajo and learn the Navajo language, I was able to learn my

culture and my ceremonies, which I was able to continue to use when I left home to go to school, to go to college. I do consider myself a traditional, indigenous person, and I continue that belief to this day.

SJ-M: Then let's see, the second part of the question was regarding my schools?

CL: Yes.

SJ-M: Our school system was a part of the public school system of the state of New Mexico, so our schools were not under the tribal schools or the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Our schools were under the state of New Mexico, and so there would be half of the schools that were within the public schools within the city, the closest city that's near us. Then the other half of the public schools would be on the Navajo Reservation, and I went to a high school, Tohatchi High School, which was located 25 miles away. We did have a school bus that picked us up practically at sunrise every, or still before the sun was coming up, because it had multiple stops to make to pick us up for school, and limited buses. All of us grew up getting up at 5, 5:30 in the morning, getting ready to catch the bus around 6 just so that we could get to all the stops before we got to our high school. The long commute is just very common. Our high school was a small public school, so the largest class we ever had was at most 30 students. I think that's one of the reasons CC was my choice to go to school at, because of the small class sizes. That was something I was used to out here in our reservation schools, so I wanted to continue to have a small class size.

SJ-M: The schools were definitely under-funded. Our high school did not have very much support services, so we didn't get a lot of the supplemental education or a lot of activities, extracurricular activities that other city schools would get. So I had to really play catch up with a lot of classes to get me prepared to go to CC, and then I had to find ways to supplement my own development as a high school student, because I knew I was going to be attending a challenging college, so I really had to find ways to get myself prepared, because the school and the teachers didn't have the resources to get us advanced classes or things like that.

SJ-M: Then I think one of the biggest things that we did have at our high school was a counselor, who really was responsible for connecting me to Colorado College. If it wasn't for our counselor connecting to CC directly, I probably wouldn't have even known that CC existed. Then the efforts between the counselor and the CC recruitment person, their efforts to recruit Native American students was really key in getting me to go to school there.

CL: Thank you. I am going to mention that for the purposes of audio clarity I will not be doing the affirmations that usually come in conversations like this, such as mmm-hmms and yes. I will try to limit that, but know that I am completely listening. My full attention is on what you're saying.

SJ-M: Okay.

CL: Okay. You mentioned that part of the reason why you ended up deciding CC was the right school for you was due to the small classes, which is something you were used to from the high school you attended. I was wondering if there were any other important reasons that made CC the right school for you.

SJ-M: Like I said, the recruiter from admissions office was highly engaged in our Native American high school, so he made extra efforts to come and visit our school, where he coordinated with our career counselor. If it wasn't for him visiting our high school several times and then he even scheduled tours and visits and took us himself directly to CC so that we could visit the campus and attend some classes and experience dorm life and even just really get the support needed, if it wasn't for this individual from the admissions office, I know that I wouldn't have known about CC firsthand. It really was that firsthand experience that he gave us that helped me make my decision. Because even the class sizes was not the ... didn't [inaudible] the only reason. It was really important for me to see the campus and know that there was going to be support for Native American students. This individual from that admissions office was very well-known for that. His name was Roberto Garcia, and he's no longer there at CC, but he was instrumental in getting many students of color to attend CC.

CL: Awesome. You mentioned that some of the efforts he made was personally coming to your high school, personally taking students to CC. Were there any other things he did that convinced you that CC was actively trying to recruit Native American students to come?

SJ-M: Yeah. He actually provided that family support. I say that because he lived right next door to CC, and his wife was a Native American. Because she was there, we were able to have a family support system for Native American students, where she cooked for us, she always invited us to her home. We got to joke and feel like we're a family. We didn't feel like we're in the dorms, we had an actual home with him and his family, to come and talk about any challenges or get advice. They're just a very, very caring couple and really wanted to be there as a support system for easily

those of us who were leaving a whole nother world and coming into CC. I think just being there as a Native American family to support Native American students was key.

CL: In terms of having this family support system, what were some of the struggles you went through as a CC student?

SJ-M: Oh gosh. [inaudible]. I think definitely that the main struggle was catching up academically to where many of the CC students were, compared to what kind of public school education I received. The first challenge I would say is that my high school, although they really were good people at my high school trying to help us get prepared for college, I was definitely behind academically when I got to CC and had to play catch up with a lot of the classes or even just learning at that higher level with students who were coming from all over the world, all over the country, with advanced education, coming from privileged families, and also having the money and resources in their communities for good quality education. So I constantly found myself having to read some longer, write longer, things that classmates caught onto quickly because they were either taught it in high school or they were aware of it from their backgrounds, were things that were new to me that I had to play catch up with and learn for myself, just to have an idea of what the professors were talking about or what I was reading in our books. That was one big challenge. But I knew that was something I was going to have to face.

SJ-M: I think another big challenge to that was that when I got to CC I didn't see any people of color. I mean initially when we visited and did the tours I rarely saw people of color, and there was reassurance that there was strong recruitment for students of color, for minority students. But when I got to CC it was ... When you come from my community out here on the Navajo Nation, we're 99% Native American, and everyone is brown, and I'm probably one of the light-complected ones that stands out out here in my reservation, whereas everybody else around me is brown. So you get to CC and I don't see any people that I grew up with, any people that were from my community, and so it really was hard to really adjust to that, because I was used to always having people of color around me. That was probably one of the second biggest challenges, because it really created homesickness and really made me want to come back home and be around people that were familiar and be around my community that I could identify with. But like I said, because of people like Roberto and his wife, I was able to offset that with their support.

SJ-M: Another big challenge I would say is the faculty and the professors and the staff at CC; it was also hard to see people of color at that level. I know at the time that I got to CC there was a big push for affirmative action, and I think we got our first woman president during my senior year at CC. There was a big push to get diversity addressed at CC when I got there, but again, those hadn't been fully implemented and so that challenge was there, to find minority faculty or staff that could work with you and mentor you or relate with you. There were a few that were there that really helped me, and I was so thankful that I could go to them.

SJ-M: Some other challenges, I think financially, although every college student has financial challenges, I mentioned earlier that I came from poverty, and I was lucky to go to CC with scholarships and financial aid. Had I not had that I would not have been able to go to college. Being able to get to CC and just live off the meal plan and work at the registrar's office for work study just to have cash on my hand once a week was really key to me surviving. Because I had no mom or father who could send me money or anything like that. My parents were divorced and my mom was a single parent, struggling to feed a family, so it was always a challenge for me to have money at CC. I just kind of had to make it last as much as I could, or just live off the meal plan, because that was really all I needed to just survive each day.

SJ-M: Other challenges I think would be, I think just the change in the landscape. Like I said, I came from in a desert mesa area, and moving up to the Pikes Peak mountainous area was really different. In a city, because I didn't grow up near a city, so just making that adjustment to the landscape and the environment was important. That hinders things in a way, because I mentioned earlier that I grew up in a traditional family and we did ceremonies all the time, so in order for me to do any kind of prayers or any type of spiritual activities I would have to leave campus, get a ride and maybe go somewhere that was a little more isolated, or go find a group. There's some Native American organizations around the Colorado Springs area that I would go visit and then do ceremonies with. Or I'd have to do it in my dorm room and make sure I got permission, because I didn't want anyone to report it. That spiritual side of my traditional beliefs was really something I needed and I grew up with it, so I had to find ways to incorporate that into dorm life and being at CC.

CL: Were there any struggles you went through socially at CC?

SJ-M: Yeah, actually. I kind of talk about this a lot when I look back on the changes that have occurred over time at CC, just as an alumni and looking back on things. I think

the time period that I came into CC was a really huge diversity push, or I don't know how to explain it, but when I came into CC in 1990, CC had just organized their Office of Minority Student Life, which is what I'm very familiar with. When I go back and visit CC it's always strange not to have that there. They just organized the establishment of their Office of Minority Student Life when I got to CC. In that same time period, 1990s, they just had BGAYLA established, and BGAYLA at the time was called the Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Alliance. Those two key groups on campus, or offices, were established when I got there. I think there was a big buzz, a big excitement, a big wow, we're actually getting BGAYLA, all these issues related to sexual orientation addressed on campus, we're starting to talk about it. We're also starting to talk about diversity issues on campus and getting an office established so that we can get more students of color and more minority groups on campus.

SJ-M: So when I came into CC in 1990, that was like the big buzz, and it was creating a lot of new conversations and discussions around race and culture and socioeconomic diversity on campus. That came with pluses and minuses. It was good to have the conversations, but it also created some uncomfortable conversations as well and some conflicts.

SJ-M: In 1991, my sophomore year at CC, we created the Native American Student Association. Now it's called NASU. I think that socially on campus was a huge step for our NASA group, because we knew we didn't have a voice at the table, and we knew that Native American students needed to be visible. Just because we weren't all over campus, we still were there and we wanted our peers and the community to know that we are here and people need to know the issues that we face. That organization was established the next year.

SJ-M: But we only came into being because of a powerful group that was on campus, and that was MEChA. I don't know if you know about MEChA, but MEChA was an amazing group of students, and they were established sometime before I came to CC. They're known for having organizations in various colleges around the United States. When MEChA was formed, they really mobilized a lot of minority students on campus. When they came into CC, I think that was probably in the '70s, they were a big group of students that were a part of a national movement that was happening. Now I understand MEChA is no longer the name. They call the student organization SOMOS. But those students in MEChA, they were like mentors to us in the Native American Student Association.

SJ-M: Also they mentored the students with the BSU. The BSU and MEChA kind of happened around the same time, but BSU, the Black Student Union, I think they're still called BSU now, they also became mentors to those of us in the Native American Student Association. It was really good, because we could identify with some of the same struggles and some of the same problems, whether it be racism or whether it be ignorance, whatever, we were able to talk about it and support each other in how we were feeling on campus.

SJ-M: Then collectively, we were able to take a lot of our concerns to the Office of Minority Student Life. At the time Rochelle Mason was the lead person, and now I think she's still on campus as a dean. She was the one who was leading the Office of Minority Student Life. We had I think a wonderful collective between all of our groups, and then with her support as well as Dean Edmonds at the time, Dean Victor Nelson-Cisneros at the time, as well as other supporters on campus, we were able to really metabolize as our Native American Student Association. I'm really proud of the fact that I was able to coordinate the first Native American Week and the first powwow that we had on campus in 1991. It was really a fun thing to have and a very strong statement to make at CC to have a Native American student organization have their own week of recognition and then also to bring a powwow, which brought a lot of the Native American community from Colorado Springs to the CC campus.

SJ-M: Then around that same time, the Asian American Student Union was established, so we all partnered together, all of us student groups. We were a collective, starting with MEChA, the BSU, BGAYLA, and then also the Asian American Student Union. I don't know if they're still there or if they have a different name, but that particular group was a whole ... All the Asian American students were all a part of that group, and we just became a huge group of friends and peers, and then we really brought a lot of advocacy to CC about diversity and inclusion on campus.

CL: Wow, that's amazing. Yes, to answer your question, ASU is still part of CC. Then there's also been the addition of KASO, which is the Korean American Student Association. Yes. In part of listing your struggles, one that you mentioned before was having financial issues, struggling financially, and also previously to that you mentioned that you came from a background of poverty. So coming to a campus where majority of the students are so privileged and come from wealthy backgrounds, did that prove as a culture shock to you? And how did you feel seeing students that were born with such privilege from the very beginning, whether that be through finances or education?

SJ-M: To answer the question, yes, it was culture shock. But again, having had a chance to visit the campus and see some of the students during my, I guess as a prospective student, I wasn't ... I didn't realize just how much of a challenge that was going to be. Back then I would say the awareness of Native Americans still being alive and existing was not as common knowledge as it is today. So I was constantly getting ignorant questions from students about the fact that, how surprised they were that Native Americans were still alive. When you think about the privileged background and the financial background of many of the students that were there, it was just a complete shock that they would honestly think that Native Americans were extinct. It was always something that at the beginning would take me by surprise, and then after it just kept becoming a common thing, you start to go, okay this is just a common thing that is happening. These students, despite their financial background or what families or privilege they come with, they obviously are getting wrong information or not given correct information.

SJ-M: After a while I think you get numb to it, and that's when you start to reach out to your peers who have the similar experience, which again would be either my mentor friends or my ASU students with ASU. They would all have similar things, like 'they think we still do this' or 'this is who our people are', and we'd have these conversations. We would be, I think the majority of us would be like, how can you come from all that knowledge and that world of privilege and have financial resources to really educate yourself, and still have a lack of knowledge about the true history, or not be able to understand what's really happening with people today? It was common. It was common for a lot of us to say, how do these students get educated? I guess you could say the same thing, there was a lot of stuff that I wasn't educated on in my high school and I was very ignorant to until someone at CC taught me about it.

SJ-M: So it was hard, it really was hard, because you would feel like they're oblivious to the reality of the world, and people must be living in bubbles. Because there were certain things that I would think they would know, and they would just be oblivious. Some were even to the point of didn't care, and that was really sad because you always hope that when you're in a college environment everybody's wanting to learn and understand other people and what's happening in the world. But there were several times, many times, I'd have a conversation or hear a very racist comment from a classmate and I would just sit there going, trying to explain to them how their comment was inappropriate and why it was inappropriate, and they wouldn't care. I don't know, again, if this answers the question, but I could feel it, and I could

say that there was always times when I felt like, is this the place for me? Should I really be at CC? Because I'm surrounded by people who are not caring about this.

SJ-M: But thankfully I had some classmates that did care and would come and we would be able to talk about these things and try to put action to it, try to bring awareness on campus. We even created an underground newsletter just to try to bring some awareness.

CL: Wow. It would seem that you did have doubts. The ignorance and not seeming to care even when educated led to doubts on your part about whether CC was the right place. So I'm wondering what other than the support and care from other students, were there any other important reasons that made you decide to remain and complete your higher education at CC?

SJ-M: Yes. I would say the peer group that I was a part of, this collective that I was explaining, we all became very close. So that was really key. Even to this day I'm still close friends with BSU members, Asian American Student Union members, MEChA members. We tell great stories, and we also look back at all the things we did on campus. So they definitely were a big reason for staying there.

SJ-M: Also, I was a member of the women's basketball team, and so my teammates also were a great support system, as well as my coaches. I loved being on the women's basketball team. It was a way that I was able to cope and also relieve stress. It's something I grew up with, I grew up playing basketball out here on the reservation, so it always kept me connected in some way to being back home. Also, there were support services that also came with playing on the women's team. I mean we got help with tutoring if needed, we had our coaches encouraging us to keep our academics up, so that was really helpful too. Playing on the women's basketball team was one of the reasons I wanted to stay at CC.

SJ-M: Also, I did not want to be a statistic. That's because of my high school counselor. That's one of the things that he ingrained in us, was don't be a dropout statistic when you go to college. Stay in college, and whatever you do, no matter how hard it is and how far away you are from home, don't be a dropout statistic. When we left, that was always something ... He even visited us a lot at college, at CC, and he would check on us and he would say, "Remember, don't be a statistic." It was always something he kept in our heads to make sure we didn't get frustrated to a point where we'd make this decision to leave.

SJ-M: I knew that I had a lot of support from my tribe. I had a lot of hope from my family to finish college. I was a first generation college student, so I had a lot of family and relatives that were behind me, wanting me to be the first one to graduate from college and get my degree. As a Native American, that really is important when you have relatives and even your clan, we all belong to clan groups in our tribe, and when they're behind you and they really want you to succeed, especially at a college like CC, very rigorous, private, prestigious school like that, they really want you to succeed, and they know that there's very few Native Americans who go to Colorado College and graduate to that end. So that was really my big motivation.

CL: Oh, thank you for that. I'm wondering, did the doubts that come with being at CC and your feelings that you felt then, I'm wondering what are your current feelings for CC and how do they differ from when you were a current student?

SJ-M: Well, that's a two-fold question, because I have inside information on what happens at CC, and that's because my daughter is a student there. So I really was hoping we made a lot of progress when I left CC, and then when I enrolled my daughter at CC and she goes to school at CC now ... I should say when she enrolled at CC and now she's going to be a senior this year, I've got three years of experience that she has shared with me. And I do feel like she's going through the same challenges that I went through, and unfortunately there's no more person there like Roberto Garcia who is a family support, which I had. There's no longer the Office of Minority Student Life in the way that we had it established there, where it was a collective of all of our student groups. I know there's the Butler Center there, but it's different and has a different feel. I could say her experiences have been full of challenges, which I thought would have been addressed by now. So I think having gone through these challenges with her and her and I saying, "Yeah, we know how that feels. That's exactly how I felt when I went to CC, that's exactly what I experienced at CC, oh my gosh that's still happening at CC, things haven't changed at CC," we go through those kinds of conversations and it disappoints me.

SJ-M: But at the same time, I see that there are some things that CC is doing to address some of those challenges. The fact that the Native American student population is still the same, it's not increasing dramatically, you're still the one and only Native American face a lot of times and you're having to speak on behalf of the Native American population in classes ... I was hoping that at this time there'd be a lot more Native American students represented at CC. That's a challenge.

SJ-M: I also think ... When we were at CC, we rallied as minority students. We did a big rally in 1993 where we walked out of class and we picketed. We made signs and we rallied outside the president's office, and we rallied for diversity, we rallied for no more talk, we rallied for action. We got a lot of support. We got support from the president, support from the deans. We started to be included in meetings to share our ideas and our suggestions, to be a part of the action planning.

SJ-M: Now, when my daughter advocates and gets active in these kinds of things, it doesn't feel like it's supported as much. It's more like she feels like an outcast I guess. That's really disheartening, because we had done all that work in the 1993s, and then now we're kind of hushing minority students and telling them, you don't have a voice, you don't have a place at the table. Although we know there's procedures and policies in place, but right now I can say she tells me on a daily basis some of the challenges that she faces trying to get an indigenous person, a Native American person represented at the Butler Center, or bringing back MEChA and their principles as an organization, bringing back a person like Roberto Garcia who does active recruitment of Native Americans and provides a family support system. Those are some things that were happening, and then I don't know when, it just stopped. Which could have been really helpful to my daughter when she started at CC.

SJ-M: The minority students, we were very close-knit. It wasn't territorialism; we were very together, and that was really important. I think that I haven't seen that. I tell her, "We used to go to the Tiger Pit back in the days," and now the Tiger Pit doesn't exist. But back then that was our place of gathering. Then we also had the Cultural Center which was on campus. That no longer exists. But both of those locations were places where we came together, we had cookouts, we had dances, we had support. We supported each other, and that kept things going.

SJ-M: I think ... I don't know all the particulars of what's happening in terms of how the planning for getting more students of color represented at CC, but I know that it's not something that we've seen change at CC in the last three years that my daughter's been there. So I myself as an alumni have shared my concerns with the leadership, and I get engaged as an alumni so that I can help find solutions. I'm always offering my help and saying, "As an alumni, I went through this. Call on me. What are some things that you're all struggling with at CC that we as alumni can help?" And I think some of us who stay in touch, we talk about that. We say, "Well, how come CC's not doing this anymore? What can we do to help them?" We try to reach out and share our ideas.

CL: Despite all the challenges that you went through as a student and the disappointments that you get to see through your daughter's experiences, on the flip side, what are the benefits or rewards that you got from being a student at CC during and after your time at the college?

SJ-M: I think a big benefit is again, the solidarity that we had as minority students. Not only did I get to share about my heritage and growing up as a Native American student, but I also got to learn about the challenges and stories from BSU members and MEChA members and Asian American student members, and we got to hear and listen to each other and try to write our stories and be there as a support system and a network for each other. Then we did that in partnership with the Office of Minority Student Life when Rochelle Mason ran that office. It was a very good support system for all of us. We were able to meet with her and we were able to talk about the challenges and come together to find solutions together. So that solidarity I was able to build for myself.

SJ-M: Then after I left CC, I was able to do that within other communities. I was able to do that in whatever groups I was working with, whether they were African-American groups or Asian groups. Then I was able to continue my relationships with my peers from those groups. So now a lot of them, we're working with our families, we are involved in other types of activist work, and so now we contact each other and still continue that solidarity. With my fellow alumni, we talk and we help each other with projects when we can, whether it's virtual or whether it's supporting each other's causes. So I think that's one of the things that I really feel like was a benefit, and I think my daughter's going to get that same kind of camaraderie or solidarity with the groups that she's working with at CC.

SJ-M: I've also had a good relationship with some of the leadership and professors at CC. I still have a good relationship with those who really worked with us, and I can contact them, and they contact me. When I come back for Homecoming or when I come back for an event at CC, I will meet with them and have dinner and we'll talk, or they'll ask me to come and present and share my stories. I think that same thing will happen with my daughter as well. She has some faculty and professors that have really come to her support and have worked in solidarity with her, so I think that's an ongoing relationship she's going to have like I had with my, like Rochelle Mason and I are still good friends. Then there's other professors on campus. Then those who've passed on, I've made it a point to go to their funerals and say some words, because of the relationship I was able to have with them, and it was always through the work we did on campus to try to improve CC.

CL: So, I'm wondering, why still stay involved with CC? I understand you're still good friends with the people that were supportive to you, and that your daughter goes here. But what are the other reasons why you still choose to stay involved with the school that put you through hurt?

SJ-M: Can you repeat that once more?

CL: Yes. Why do you still choose to be involved in CC, other than the fact that your daughter goes here and that you mentioned friendships. Because those friendships can be maintained without direct involvement at CC, so I wonder the reasons behind why you choose to still be actively involved with the CC community.

SJ-M: I think for the type of person that I am, I continue to stay involved in my high school, my local high school as an alumni because I have four years of memories invested in my high school. I'm also a firm believer that we need to give back to our communities, and so my high school is my community. The type of person I am, I do that because it's something that is important to do in our own community building, and then also to have a better place for the next generation. So I consider CC the same way. CC, I spent four years there with memories, friendships, challenges, happy times, and I went to CC fully invested and being proud of my college and being proud of my education. So for me to stay involved in CC is my way of giving back to my college and helping my college to improve as an alumni. That's just the kind of person I am. It's time that was invested of my life. I think there's some of their students I've met who just jump from college to college, who go to college because their family paid for it, their mom or dad paid for it, who don't really invest in their experience, or friends who go to college just because it's expected of them and they really don't know why they're in college.

SJ-M: But for me, growing up poor and being the fact that I was a first generation college graduate, college was more than just a place to go, have something to do. Going to college was a serious decision for me and staying at a college, making sure I graduated within four years from that college, was a very intentional decision for me, based on how I was raised and the kind of person I am. So that's why I stayed involved in CC and didn't leave, and I continue to stay involved, and I definitely would not have recommended CC to my daughter if I didn't think highly of CC. So she got blessings to go to CC, because I know there are good people at CC, and there's a good experience to be had through all the challenges. When you live there for four years, it's your second home, and that's what I think of CC.

- CL: More broadly speaking, what role do you think your experiences and education at CC have played in your life after?
- SJ-M: Broadly, I think it really helped me to get ahead of some of the national politics I think that was happening. Because I got to meet a lot of different people at CC from different socioeconomic backgrounds, from different politics, and so when I came back home to the reservation and I was in government meetings, state meetings, if I was in tribal meetings with our tribal leaders, I was able to use that knowledge from a national perspective and share that with the discussions that were taking place out here. It was really good to have that background of not only the education, the classes that I was taking and what I learned in those classes, but also just from the campus activities and all of the activist work that we did on campus. I think that was one of the big things, was just having the different perspectives from CC to bring back to a lot of those meetings.
- SJ-M: Also, I think my ability to negotiate and be able to articulate with others who went to college and be able to talk academically about issues was really important. It's something that really helped me from CC. I was able to talk with various groups academically about issues that were either facing our community or through policy development or whether it's issues in New Mexico or whether it's something happening nationally, I was able to talk about it from an academic perspective.
- SJ-M: Let's see. I think CC also was a very well-known college, it had a good reputation. So I think a lot of times when I ran into people and I told them I was a graduate from CC, they would say, "Oh, I heard that's a good school," or "That's a good school," and they identified with how rigorous the academics were and it being a private college, the kind of caliber of education that we had. So it did, I guess some, it did help to be a student from CC and people recognizing it when I moved on into the workforce.
- CL: Thank you. What would you describe as being one of your most vivid memories of CC?
- SJ-M: Hmm, one of my most vivid memories. Hmm.
- CL: This could be several. It doesn't have to be just one. If you have a list, please feel free to describe all of them.
- SJ-M: Well, one vivid memory that I really cherish is, like I said earlier, I was a part of a group that put together what we called an underground newsletter. What we were doing is we were trying to get our stories into the *Catalyst*, the CC newspaper. Our

stories weren't getting published, and so we kept sending letters to the editor saying, "Why aren't you putting in our stories, or our letters to the editor?" or whatever it was that we were trying to submit to the school newspaper. And they were just saying, "We're not interested in the story, it's not something we want to print," or whatever their issue or whatever their excuse was.

SJ-M: So we got frustrated and decided, why are we trying to get our college newspaper to publish our stories? Why don't we just start our own? So we got together, again different members from different groups, and we started scheduling monthly dinners at the students' apartment off campus, and we started writing our stories and putting them together in a newsletter. Then we would go and make copies of the newsletter, and then we would distribute it all over campus. We did this for, I don't know how many months, maybe a whole year or two, I don't remember how long. But it's a vivid memory because I always looked forward to those dinner gatherings at that apartment, because all of us would sit there, we'd all make food, we'd all sit there at our computers or typewriters, and we would all be writing our stories, whether it was an editorial, whether it was creative writing, a fiction piece. We also had some people there who were artists and did the cartoons or did the artwork. We would just sit there and laugh and talk about our stories and go through editing process.

SJ-M: Back then we only had access to a copy machine, so what we would do is make copies of the article ... No, we would print the articles, we would cut them with scissors, tape them onto Xerox paper as straight as possible, and then we used clear tape and then we would go to Kinko's or some Xerox company and then we would print thousands of them. It's so funny, because that was our way of putting newsletters together back then. They didn't have all this fancy stuff where you could just digitalize it on a computer and send it to a professional printer. Now you could do that easily, but back then it was all by hand. There was no cut and paste on a computer, it was just all scissors and Scotch tape. We had fun.

SJ-M: After we put our newsletter out, we would really be proud of the conversations it would create, and some of the dialogue that it would inspire. We would have some professors share it in their classes, and then we would get into this big debate with the *Catalyst* newspaper staff, and then they'd write a piece against one of our pieces and we would have this exchange of points of view through their newspaper and our newsletter. It was really I think a fun time. I've asked if anyone's ever done that again on campus and it doesn't sound like anyone's done that. So I have all the

original copies of those newsletters with me that I'd always thumb through and remember all those evenings putting them together.

CL: Wow, that's amazing. Is there any possible way we could get copies of those newspapers? Also, would you mind telling me what the name of the newspaper was?

SJ-M: Yeah, it was called *Fight the Power*. Yeah, I told Rochelle any time she wants copies I'll make copies for her if they wanted to catalogue them or ... I think one time she wanted to do it, we just never followed up on it. But yeah, I'd be happy to.

CL: Yes, we would love to have those copies. When we get them we will most definitely be taking them to Jessy Randall, who is the archivist at special collections in the library at the college, so that would be a great addition to the history of Colorado College.

SJ-M: Oh, yeah. I don't remember how many volumes we made, but I have a folder full. I'll check and see if I can make time to copy all of them, but we should get it done. Somebody should do it.

CL: That'd be amazing. Wow, thank you so much. As you were speaking, it seems like this is a moment that you were very proud of, so two questions arose from your memory. One, it seemed that going and meeting in this apartment, having food, writing stories, was a way of self-care. Also, it's a moment in which I can hear the pride in your voice. So the two questions are, was this self-care for you? And if it was, were there other things you did to take care of yourself at CC? And secondly, what was the proudest moment you went through at CC, if this isn't it?

SJ-M: Yeah, I think it was self-care. I mean I think I realized how much I love writing through that. I didn't even realize I was a writer until we started putting that newsletter together, and we'd just tell everyone, write. We had great mentors. One was from MEChA, one was from BSU, and one was from AASU. They were all English majors, so it was great to have the English majors helping us with this newsletter. They encouraged me to be a writer, so that's where I did find a love for writing and an outlet for getting feelings out. I guess in a way that's what you would call self-care.

SJ-M: The other part of the question I don't remember.

CL: Okay, so the other question was, what was your proudest moment? Because I heard a lot of pride as you were relating this memory.

SJ-M: Oh. The proudest moment for me was coordinating the first CC powwow. That was my first time coordinating a powwow outside of my home and community, which is really different in Native American communities. I mean if you're doing it back home people know you, your relatives help, there's a certain way that you would do it back home, recognizing tribal leaders in your clanship and certain protocols. Now, being a CC student in Colorado Springs, which is not my home community, it was different to coordinate a powwow. So I was really proud that we got funding to do it. That was the first big major step, because it costs money to put on a powwow. We also did the first Native American Week, so I mean I was very proud of that whole week of activities and events that we pulled together for the first time at CC. It was historic, it was celebrated. And when we got to the powwow part, to actually have a powwow, we had it outside of Armstrong Quad and so the logistics of having a powwow on the quad and getting a sound system and parking for all the visitors coming from the communities, that was a challenge.

SJ-M: But just to have pulled it off and walk away with success and people really enjoying the powwow from start to finish, and community members recognizing us Native American students, was really special. It really made you proud to be a Native American student at CC, and welcoming your relatives and people from around, different tribes surrounding Colorado Springs, different organizations. Them coming and seeing you as a Native American student on campus was really, it really was impactful. We had dancers that came in in their regalia and their outfits. They blessed the ground, they prayed. We had drum groups playing and you could just hear the drum bouncing off the buildings, the sound of the drum.

SJ-M: Students who didn't think Native American students existed, that we were extinct, that day they got a wake up call that we're here. They heard the drums, they saw us dancing, and it sparked a lot of interest from students saying, "Wow, I never saw this before. I didn't know Native Americans still existed." It just really made you proud.

CL: Yeah. That's amazing that you did such work at that age, that had such an impact. That's amazing to hear as a current student here. To respect and honor your time, I will ask one of the last questions that I have for you, which is basically, given the purpose of the People's History project at CC, is there anything else you would like to share for us? That could include advice to current students of color, ways in which we could engage to effect the change that we want to. Anything you have to share with us would be greatly welcomed.

SJ-M: I think what I would like to share is, after I heard what happened on campus with comments towards Rochelle Mason and Dean Edmonds, it really did have an effect on a lot of us students of color who went to school there with them while they were in leadership roles. To me, I would say that what I would share with students at CC is to push the envelope, to continue to push the envelope, to not be afraid to speak up for what is right, and to be fierce and courageous for CC. I think that what we do on campus at CC really does impact the world, because what we help our peers to see, they will take back out to the world one day when they leave CC. At times it could be uncomfortable and it could create a lot of doubt whether CC's a place to be. I think that it's so important to not be afraid of being that lonely voice out there that's trying to do something good.

SJ-M: So I think that's one of the things, that we have to keep encouraging each other that it's, the struggle is always there no matter where we're at, whether it's at CC or whether we're at the White House. The struggle is always going to be there. You can either sit back and watch, or you can stand up and take some action to help. I think that's one of the things that we'd encourage students, is stand up and help those students who are trying to speak up for what is right, stand up in solidarity with those groups who are facing oppression, and be there for those who don't have a voice, who are in the margins and who continue to be invisible. Be a voice to help your peers see those things.

SJ-M: There's a lot of students who can really be powerful allies at CC, and I have some good friends from CC who are my allies. They keep me strong to this day as a mother, as a woman, as an indigenous person. Those are the kind of allies we need to become at CC, so that we're there for each other afterwards. I think that's the big message for me, is solidarity and bridging all those gaps with the CC community.