**GatesFoundation\_HortenciaArmendariz\_ElizabethRockenbach\_FINAL**

Hortencia Armendariz and her mentee Elizabeth Rockenbach discuss their relationship throughout Elizabeth's time in school, in particular, supporting her during the college application process. Hortencia is a family resource coordinator for a California school district and a member of the CARPE College Access Network, which helps students overcome barriers to entering college.

**Hortencia:** Many years ago, when you were a little girl, I would see you and your brothers out there playing right behind McDonald's, and I worried about you because I could tell that your family was struggling. I found where you went to school. I contacted the principal and the counselor, and I told them about my worry. And throughout the years, I made sure that we would send over Thanksgiving meals and Christmas gifts. We provided you with clothes and school supplies and personal hygiene items.

**Elizabeth:** I always felt like someone was looking after us, but I just didn't know like who.

**Hortencia:** We officially met each otheryour high school senior year through our CARPE network — which is a network helping seniors go to the university that they’re applying for. We were working on your college application when I downloaded your school transcript and there was a picture — that was the little girl that I knew — and I said, "Did you live behind McDonald's?" And you said, "Yes. How did you know?"

**Elizabeth:** I was like, "Whoa." I was in shock when I found out who it was and how everything just connected and made sense.

**Hortencia:** Yeah, it was just beautiful. And I told you apply to San Diego State University. At that time, you thought that you weren't going to be able to afford going to college. How did you feel, Elizabeth, when we finished with financial aid and you saw the dollar signs?

**Elizabeth:** I was just so shocked. This is going to help a lot. Even to this day, I can't explain how like thankful I am.And then likemy acceptance letter — I was like, "Whoa," again, in shock. I was feeling all kinds of emotions, just excited and thankful.

**Hortencia:** You just finished your semester with what grades?

**Elizabeth:** Straight A's.

**Hortencia:** Woo!

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, it's really like a blessing. Even through all this hardships, I still managed to like be on my two feet and stand up strong.

**Hortencia:** But on Christmas break, I get a call that your house is burning. You were completely homeless.

**Elizabeth:** I was feeling very overwhelmed. I stopped feeling emotions. I was even considering dropping out of school to focus on myself because I wasn't able to manage.

**Hortencia:** So I calledthe new dean of San Diego State. I told them your story. Then, I get a phone call from San Diego State offering to help out. What does she tell you?

**Elizabeth: “**We found an apartment for you to stay in.” They’ll be paying my rent as long as I'm attending school, and they'll pay for my furniture and like everything. Once I got the keys, I was like, "OK, this is really happening. It's going to be a good year."

**Hortencia:** Elizabeth, I am so, so proud of you. You are a light. You’ve shined all these years in my heart.

**Elizabeth:** Thank you for helping me and being my mother figure.

**Hortencia:** And thank you for being my daughter that I never had and allowing me to be in your world. I will always be here for you.