

Eden Haven-Martinez: Focused and Determined to Find the Right Direction¹

January, 2014

Eden Haven-Martinez studied her phone, checking the traffic on I-80 as her husband Victor drove, taking the Richards Blvd. on-ramp to head east and then south on their way back home to Santa Maria, California. The couple had just spent a night and a day in Davis where Eden had interviewed for the Teacher credential/Masters program at the University of California, the final part of an extensive graduate school application process that included writing a number of essays and passing state required exams.

Doing the interview in person was optional and Eden knew she could have talked through skype with Pauline Holmes, the Lecturer and Supervisor for the English cohort. However the face-to-face talk was more personal and Eden wanted to ensure she made a good impression. In addition, she and Victor wanted to spend more time in the Sacramento area to see if it was really a place they wanted to live for the next two or more years. With Eden nearly accepted for the two year program at UC Davis, Victor was hoping to complete his requirements for a BA at CSU Sacramento.

As Victor drove, Eden looked at the passing scenery and thought about all the places she had lived and what might be in her future. After high school, her enthusiasm for educational advancement had taken her north to CSU Humboldt and then south to UC San Diego, and her trajectory had even included a short time in the central valley while she was a student at CSU Fresno. Eden had a great sense of adventure and was determined to be self-sufficient. She wanted to find a career that would help her get ahead in life and put her on a path to financial stability. After a car and a job, the next goal Eden had set for herself was a place she could call her own, perhaps a condo or a small house.

The meeting with Ms. Holmes had gone well and as they headed home, Eden and Victor shared their impressions of Sacramento and all the things they needed to plan in case the move became a reality. Eden was expecting to hear within a couple of weeks whether she

¹ This case was prepared for use as the basis for class instruction and discussion by Sylvia Sensiper, PhD, Director of the Guardian Professions Program, Office of Graduate Studies, UC Davis. The following have provided funding for the GPP: The Stuart Foundation, the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, The California Wellness Foundation and the University of California Office of the President.

had been accepted and Victor would hear shortly after about his application. There were excellent opportunities for both of them but Eden knew Sacramento wouldn't be their final stop. Once they finished their degrees, Eden wanted to go abroad and teach in another country. Was this the next step that would take them to that horizon?

Early Life and Foster Care

Eden grew up living in homeless shelters and motels but was always together with her sister, stepfather and mother. Then her mother's mother passed away and her own mother took it very hard. "That was my mother's closest person and it was really, really hard for her," Eden said. "We were always a family until that moment in time when my grandma died." After that, Eden's mother began to abuse drugs and she and Eden's stepfather divorced. When her mother went to jail for driving under the influence, Eden and her sister went into foster care. "My biological father wanted to take us, but my mother said we didn't know him. In the end we stayed in Santa Maria to be close to my mom who was in Santa Barbara."

Eden and her sister were first placed with a Latino family where they were both able to learn Spanish. When they needed to move, they went to live with another family, but the household dynamics were difficult. By this time Eden was nearly 17 and she made the decision that it was better to be on her own. Her sister was placed with another family and Eden went into a transitional housing placement as a part of the Family Care Network, eventually moving out of that situation to go on to college.

For Eden, school was a 'safe place,' where she found supportive teachers who were able to provide more continuity than the social workers who were assigned to her case. "I had too many social workers and they were always in and out of my life," she said. "I think teachers were the ones who stuck around at the end of the day." Eden participated in AVID and was known for her athleticism and running cross-country. When she applied to college, she was accepted at a number of places and had her choice of both UCs and CSUs.

Going to College from North to South

Eden and Victor (who was her boyfriend at the time) decided to go to Humboldt State University in northern California. "It seemed out of the way and had lots of trees," Eden said. "But when we went to orientation we decided we didn't like it. We thought it would be a college town but it was so small." Instead, the couple decided to move back to Santa Maria and attend the local community college, Alan Hancock College, while they decided on their next move. "I think as a high school student I thought 'I can do all of this!' but we didn't even have a car and we needed references for an apartment," she said. "So going back to Santa Maria helped us get established."

Eden took a course load of liberal studies as well as two years of French and one year of Spanish, always with the idea that she would transfer to a UC once she had completed the required classes. She ran cross-country and also had a job at Penney's where she worked many hours. When she finally applied to transfer she was accepted to UCLA, UCSB, UC

Davis and UCSD and chose the latter because it was close to the beach and had good weather.

Linguistics at UC San Diego

Eden went on her own to San Diego where she enrolled in the Eleanor Roosevelt College and chose to major in linguistics. She had worked within the semester system at the community college and now she had the challenge of adjusting to the quarter system. Overall, however, Eden liked UCSD and enjoyed her experience. She participated in some of the events sponsored by the UC San Diego Guardian Scholars Program but primarily appreciated the notifications about scholarships and resources that the program provided. For a student like Eden, who had a high sense of independence, this was the kind of support she needed. Too many programs for alumni of care did not acknowledge a student's ability to manage and care for themselves and Eden had found them alienating and knew other students did too. "I received emails about a computer scholarship, loans, tutoring and the wellness center," she said. "I liked that they let us have freedom but were also there when we needed them I know some people went to more events and some people went to less and they just let you have the choice."

Knowing she had no time to waste if she wanted to go on to graduate school, Eden attended a Diversity in Graduate Education event in her first year and paid close attention to the advice offered by professors as to what a student might do with an MA in linguistics. "We had meetings and the professors told us about teacher and professor salaries," Eden said. "They suggested we thinking about being a teacher because there isn't too much difference in pay and there is far less schooling. They thought there was a need for linguistics majors in the teaching profession because we know how to analyze whether what we are doing is working and then how to change it." Eden also participated in a research project conducted by Professor John Moore on the difference between Spanish spoken in San Diego and Tijuana.

Over the summer between her junior and senior year, Eden researched different linguistics programs to determine whether she wanted to do a PhD or a Masters. She visited both CSU San Jose and CSU Fresno to learn about the programs and also to see what kind of assistance might be available through the support programs for former foster youth at each school.² She applied to both CSUSJ and CSU Fresno and also to CSU Long Beach, ultimately deciding to enroll at CSU Fresno. "Unfortunately Long Beach informed me that I'd been accepted much later than the other two because I would have chosen that program," Eden said. "They had a concentration with linguistics and anthropology and linguistics with TESOL, but I had already decided on Fresno when I found out I'd been admitted."

² Programs at various universities have different names and at CSU Fresno, the program is called the Renaissance Scholars Program.

CSU Fresno

Eden had a friend help her move to Fresno but it was a difficult transition as getting settled in the city was challenging without a car. Looking for a job was hard because she had to take the bus to get around. Fortunately Eden still had the Chaffee grant available for a couple of semesters, but had to take student loans for living expenses and everything else.

Although Eden was welcome to attend events at the CSU Renaissance Scholars Program, she found there was no support for graduate students. “If you are a graduate, you are on your own and it wasn’t like the program at UC San Diego. I felt like I had to do more for myself and it was definitely a lot harder.” Ultimately, Eden tried to work two jobs while she was in school.

Eden did well in the TESOL class for the linguistics program and also in the phonetics class, however she had some difficulties with another of the core classes, and this caused her to re-think what she wanted. “The class in which I didn’t do well was only offered once a year so I would have had to wait to take the class again the following year,” she explained. “I would have had to take out another loan and it was complicated. I tried to transfer over to the teaching credential program and was accepted but this caused difficulties with my student loans and that became a big problem.” Finally, after thinking over her options, Eden decided to complete the TESOL certificate and then moved back to Santa Maria. “I liked the linguistics program at CSU Fresno,” Eden said, “but it wasn’t for me.”

Back in her hometown, Eden first worked in a stockroom at Cal Poly until she found a job working with children with disabilities. She and Victor got married, but she kept the education door open. “I told Victor I wanted to go back to school and I started studying for the CSET tests that are required by the state to become a teacher.”

Moving On

In the Spring of 2013, Eden got an email from a social worker that she knew in the Family Care Network about a new program starting at UC Davis that was intended to help former foster youth go to graduate school. She contacted the Director of the Guardian Professions Program (GPP), attended an orientation at the UC Davis School of Education and began the application process. “I needed to write two essays for the general UC Davis graduate school application and then another four shorter essays for the School of Education,” Eden explained. “I had already passed one of the CSET tests but I also needed to complete three additional exams.” Eden received financial help with parts of the application process and also assistance with writing the essays from the GPP. She submitted her application in November and was called for the interview in January.

Now, with all that behind her and the interview with Ms. Holmes completed, Eden had a good feeling that she’d be coming back. The credential took one year and then she would be eligible for a teaching job. UC Davis held a large job fair in the Spring and Eden was hoping to find something in the Sacramento area so they could stay until Victor finished

his degree. Living in the city would also make completing the Masters degree program that followed the teaching credential convenient, as UC Davis held classes on Saturdays. As she switched the radio station and turned to tell Victor her thoughts, Eden hoped she had done enough in the interview to move onto this next step.