

Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project

Interviewee: Ochal, Melissa

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Abstract: In her interview with Laura Robbins, she speaks about her perspective as a non-native Charlestonian, her experiences in teaching international students about southern and United States culture, and the changes and quirks she has seen in the city throughout the years. As someone who has lived in multiple places in her life, Ochal perceives the differences in regions as well as identify certain aspects of Charleston that are changing the city.

Biographical Note: Melissa Ochal was born in Chicago but grew up in Columbus, Ohio. From undergraduate to graduate school, she has been working with international students in Boston and Columbus. In 2013, she and her husband moved to Charleston for her job as an associate director at the College of Charleston where she deals with international students and scholars as well as exchange programs.

Project Details:

In the summer of 2018, student researchers from the College of Charleston conducted oral histories for the research project, *Voices of Southern Hospitality*. The project documents diverse opinions and stories about southern hospitality in Charleston, South Carolina, but also offers a deeper and more intimate history of a changing community. Over the past thirty years (early-1990s to 2018), the Charleston peninsula and its surrounding islands have experienced rapid economic growth and rapid cultural and ecological changes. The *Voices of Southern Hospitality* project chronicles this profound transformation with the personal histories of Charleston residents. The project was launched in June 2018 with funding from The Committee for Innovative Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the College of Charleston. In addition to documenting important stories, the project was designed to train College of Charleston students in oral history research methods. rn

Interviewer Initials: L.R.

Interviewee Initials: M.O.

LR: It's July 25th, 2018 and this is Laura Robbins sitting down with Melissa Ochal at the C of C Center for International Education in Charleston, South Carolina. Melissa, can you tell me how long you've lived in Charleston and what brought you here?

MO: I have been in Charleston just over five years. I moved down here for my job at the College of Charleston in March of 2013.

LR: And what drew you to Charleston besides your job? Had you been here before?

MO: I'd only ever been here for one day to visit with my mom and sister. My husband and I were living in Ohio and all of our family was in North or South Carolina. So we were the only ones who were still left in Ohio. So this job came up and we're like, "Oh, we would be closer to family if we were down here." So my parents live in Pawleys Island. My sister's in Charlotte, his family's outside of Charlotte area, so we're like "We're moving in the right direction." So yeah, it was just total timing. But no, I hadn't really been to Charleston before.

LR: So are you from Ohio originally?

MO: Originally Chicago.

LR: It seems there's a lot of people here from Ohio.

MO: Yes.

LR: Do you know why?

MO: Supposedly... so we started going on vacation in Hilton Head in 1982 from Chicago. But somebody told me that they think it has to do with how far South Carolina was marketing itself as a tourist destination, that a lot of people from Ohio, like were drawn to South Carolina. So it's sort of interesting. Yeah. Yeah. There are a lot of people from Ohio. It's true.

LR: So what were your first impressions of Charleston when you got here?

MO: Well, so I came to interview for my job in December. So in Ohio it was very, very cold and I remember it being like, I don't know, it was probably like 60 or 70 here. And I remember Andrew, my boss, now boss, taking me on a tour and I saw a woman in a down parka coat by the water. I was like, are you kidding me? I could be in shorts and a tee shirt now. So that struck

me. I was like, okay so the weather is drastically different and people are not used to the cold. I mean, the weather's nice. The beaches, the campus location is great. So those were some of my initial-

LR: So what brought you to the International Education Center?

MO: So I had been working in international education since I graduated from college, actually. So my first job out of undergrad was working with international students at Brandeis University in Boston. I went to school in Boston. And so I started working with international students and I was like, hey, this would be a cool career. So then I had grown up in Columbus, Ohio and then moved back to Columbus to go to graduate school at Ohio State. And I worked in their international office with their international students for one year as a grad student and then one year full time. And then I moved and was the director of an international office at a smaller university in Columbus for almost seven years. And there I did international students and study abroad. So this was sort of a related position. There are some things here that I didn't do before, but a lot of it is similar stuff.

LR: You encounter a lot of international students obviously through your job, all semester. How do you think that that makes your experience as a Charlestonian different from others?

MO: That's a good question. I think there's things about like the cultural stuff that maybe other people wouldn't recognize that I specifically have to talk to the international students about. Like I have to talk to them about how complete strangers, if they make eye contact on the street, that person may say "hi" to them. 'Cause that can be a little alarming to some international students or that people will smile without knowing you, you know, if you just see someone on the street, they'll probably smile at you. That it's... You could probably stop most people and ask for help if you needed it and they would help you. So I've talked to them about that. Probably the pace of life, sort of, here. Especially... I lived in Boston. My family's originally from Chicago, so used to like big cities where people move fast. And down here, it's not so much. There's not necessarily that speed of things. I'm trying to think if there's anything else. The food, we talk about the food; prepare them for all the yummy food. So, yeah.

LR: So you're essentially making these international students aware of southern hospitality here?

MO: Mhm, yeah.

LR: What was it like for you to learn it yourself? Because you kind of have to learn it before you teach it to someone else.

MO: Yeah. Yeah. I think I got used to the, like the friendliness of the people pretty quickly. You know, people in Ohio are friendly, but it's a little different here I guess. The pace you just got to sort of get used to, and Charleston is, I don't know, much more cosmopolitan. So my sister went to school in Clemson and I used to go visit her from Boston and it was like night and day being in rural South Carolina, in particular. So Clemson's pretty rural. I mean, I remember us trying to find food on a Sunday morning and everything was closed 'cause we were clearly supposed to be in church and in Boston everything would have been open. So I remember that sort change, you know, Charleston, I feel like has enough people not from here that you don't, I don't know, it's maybe not as...

LR: As truly southern.

MO: As truly southern as like a small town might be just 'cause there's so many people who aren't from here anyway.

LR: So it was easier for you to adjust.

MO: Yeah, I think so, I think so. Yeah.

LR: And you had already been exposed to some southern...

MO: Yeah. Yeah. So I'd visited my sister in Clemson. My parents had been in Pawleys Island for five years when we moved down here. So yes, it's sort of gotten used to some things along the way. Yeah. Yeah.

LR: So you haven't been here too, too long, but have you begun to notice a change in Charleston? Like an influx of people from other areas like yourself or with tourism and just people coming in temporarily. Development?

MO: I would just say the development and the traffic. So when we were house hunting, we were looking primarily in West Ashley. Our house is six miles from campus and some days it takes like 40 minutes to get home. So that's frustrating and annoying. So I think, yeah, the city is not planning for the growth and taking into account the quality of life of people who actually live here. I don't see as much of a, like, I couldn't tell you for sure when there were more tourists in the town or not. Like my mom, my parents in Pawleys Island, like they literally don't go grocery shopping on Saturday because that's when all the condos switch over. And so the grocery stores are a mob, like for us, we don't see that. I think also in West Ashley, you know, you don't see as much of the tourists. But I do notice maybe I pay a little bit more attention to like the foreigners, the international people who are visiting Charleston. You know, you just,

when you work with international people, you sort of just get an eye for who's not from here. So my husband and I took our little boy to a 4th of July celebration up in North Charleston and there was this group of guys in front of us. I was like, "Those are totally Europeans." Like they're just... the way they dress or they carry themselves, you know, and then we got a little closer and I was like, "Yep, they're German." So that was just sort of interesting. So it's interesting to see what the tourists check out while they're here too. So that's sort of been interesting to see.

LR: Also, I wanted to ask, have you noticed an increase in the number of international students that come here?

MO: No, it's probably been pretty steady I would say. We had a big population from Brazil. Were you involved?

LR: I remember.

MO: Yeah. So I think that sort of skews it a little bit. So it's probably been pretty steady without those students. But the largest was when we had that big group of Brazilian students. 'Cause at one point they were almost a hundred of them here between ones that were doing intensive English and they're not a degree program. So that was probably the biggest out of my five years that I've been here and it's been sort of steady the rest of the way. I would say nationally, there's an anti-Trump trend with international students coming to the U.S. They feel like it's not welcoming and it's not going to be a good environment. And I think there's only so much southern hospitality that can be portrayed that would counteract that bigger picture of hospi-[tongue-tied]. You know what I mean. Yes.

LR: So would you consider yourself a local at this point? Do you feel well acclimated to the area?

MO: Yes and no. My husband and I were talking about that 'cause he was also not from Columbus. And we were talking about how we actually, he actually has now lived longer in Charleston than he did in Columbus, but he still felt more connected in Columbus than in Charleston. I think Charleston's sort of a... we've talked to our friends about this. It's sort of also a weird place to sort of break in socially, I don't know. Because like either you have the people who've been here forever and so they don't, they have their friend group, you know, and then transplants seem to come and go a little bit more quickly. So...

LR: You're kind of in the middle.

MO: So, kind of in the middle. Yeah. Yeah. And there's still parts of the city I haven't explored, you know, I sort of know downtown pretty well, but there's crazy street names, I'm like, "I don't know where that is". So yeah, sort of in between. It's familiar and not all at the same time.

LR: So you have young children or-

MO: A little boy. Yeah.

LR: A little boy. And was he born in Charleston?

MO: Yeah, he was born at MUSC.

LR: Okay. So, so far, how old is he?

MO: He's almost a year and a half.

LR: A year and a half. Okay he's not that old, but if you continue to live in this area, do you see him growing up in a different way than you did because he's in the South or in this hospitable environment?

MO: Yeah. One piece of southern life that he is obsessed with already are boiled peanuts, which I had never had until I moved to Charleston and he loves them. I just went to a farmer's market today to buy him boiled peanuts. So that was just one thing like southern food that, I mean most people in Ohio probably never had boiled peanuts. So that's sort of interesting. I think he will have a different experience in terms of education than I did. South Carolina doesn't seem to invest as much in their K-12, maybe higher ed too, as Ohio. So, you know, my education was really, really strong K-12, and I don't know about the schools here. I mean South Carolina doesn't have a good reputation, you know, education-wise. The neighborhood that we live in and the school that he will go to will probably be more diverse than it would have been if we would've stayed in the same area in Columbus. So that's a good thing. You know, he'll get to meet people that are different from him, from different ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic backgrounds. 'Cause I think West Ashley is a little bit more diverse within itself than a lot of the neighborhoods in Columbus were kind of... everyone who lived there was sort of on the same, had the same background. So that will be interesting. Even his little daycare right now has a little bit more diversity in it than some of my friends up north have in theirs. So.

LR: Do you think that he will... I mean you're saying that he'll be exposed to people that are different from himself, so he'll grow up socially different than he would in Ohio?

MO: Yeah. I think so.

LR: And grasp that southern...

MO: Yes. Yes. I don't know though he'll...

LR: How southern he'll be 'cause he-

MO: Yeah. 'Cause we're not. Well, I mean my husband is western North Carolina, so he has a mountain North Carolina accent, so I don't, yeah, it's sort of interesting. So I've met some students from Charleston who are very like, "Yes ma'am. No ma'am." Like that sort of, and I can't picture him doing that... like that to me is sort of a hallmark of southern, you know, conversational skills. I don't know that he will ever pick that up. 'Cause we don't do that in our house.

LR: It seems that Charleston has, I don't know, different degrees of southern. Even people that have been here for a long, long time. It seems that some people are very traditionally southern, and some aren't. So it's interesting to see that. Maybe they had parents from the North.

MO: Right. Yeah, that's true. That's true.

LR: So can you draw any parallels between here and Ohio, maybe something that is very similar or things that are very different? Is there anything that you miss a lot from home that you can't find here?

MO: I miss diversity of food choices, ethnic food in particular. In Columbus you could eat Ethiopian and you could eat Thai and you can eat a lot more ethnic cuisine very easily. I feel like down here it's changed a little bit since I've- I would say that's probably a change that I've noticed in the five years that there's a little bit more diversity in the food. I felt like when you got down, when we moved here, everything was southern seafood or southern fried or barbecue and that was sort of your options, or pizza. And I feel like now there's a little bit more food diversity. It's like Columbus, is like hospitality-wise, similar to Charleston. It's funny; my commute, I lived further from campus but my commute was shorter 'cause we took highways. Can you repeat the question? Let me see if I can think of-

LR: Just drawing parallels between the two spaces. They can be things that are, or even things that are vastly different.

MO: I'd say Columbus, too, had a big influx of people who weren't from there, as well. It's a growing city. So there were a lot of people- we moved from Chicago; there were a lot of people that I- I remember in elementary school, very few of my classmates were actually born there. So I think it also had a big population of people who weren't from there that had moved into

the city. The weather is obviously different. The response to the weather is different. It's funny. I think, yeah, I think the hospitality thing because I was always working with international students, I was always sort of aware of what sort of reception they got. And I would say they were... We had very few incidents of them not being really welcomed by the campus community and then the bigger communities at both of the schools that I worked at. So I'd say that's pretty similar.

LR: Would you consider the international students that you encounter 'tourists' in a way, even if they're here a semester or a year... long-term tourists?

MO: Sort of. Yeah. 'Cause they're really, yeah-

LR: They're eager to explore.

MO: And they definitely- so I notice a difference between the exchange students and the degree-seeking students. So the exchange students who are here for a semester or year definitely are the ones who want to go and see and experience more of those sort of touristy things that we do. The degree seekers, you know, sort of we'll see them occasionally, but they're not necessarily the ones that are going to go to the tea plantation or the harbor cruise with us. You know, I feel like-

LR: They have more time.

MO: They have more time to do that. And I remember sort of feeling the same way when I lived in Boston I guess. Like, oh, I've got time. And then when I moved away I was like, shoot, I didn't do these things. Like why didn't I take the train downtown more often to go?

LR: You think you have time.

MO: Yeah. So I think for the exchange students who know that they have very limited time, they're a lot more engaged outside of the university with some of those activities that we do. And also just exploring the southeast of the U.S. In general, you know, they zip off to other cities.

LR: On breaks. Yeah. Yeah.

LR: So do you have any funny stories about international students adapting here, maybe with the southerners?

MO: We always talk about tea, like the like-

LR: Like sweet tea?

MO: Yes. And like you have to... They always look at me like I'm crazy when I talk about that at orientation. Like if you want hot tea you have to say hot tea. If you want unsweetened iced tea, you have to specifically ask that if you want tea. So I think that one's been sort of a- they're like confused by- yeah. They're like "What in the world is this?" I don't know if I have any really funny stories.

LR: That's okay.

MO: I just, I remember one of the students from Tartu came, we had that really bad ice storm that may have been right before you-

LR: Last December?

MO: Sorry, before that one. So there was one like my, like that first fall, so it was probably four and a half years ago and the city was shut down for like three days because of it. Anyway, she was from Tartu and I remember her wearing like a wool sweater and she was just shocked. Like she was like, "I'm melting. It's not that cold here, even though it's winter." And she's like looking out the window.

LR: Because Estonia is much worse.

MO: She's like "This could be any day, you know, the amount of ice and snow you guys have is just a regular Tuesday and we'd keep going." So that was sort of funny to see their reaction to that. But for the most part they really, really are engaged. We always ask them at orientation what foods they're looking forward to trying and what they're not looking forward to or what they won't try. So that's really interesting to see what they put.

LR: What do they normally say that they won't try?

MO: Some of them don't eat seafood. So yeah, I'm like, what? They're scared of boiled peanuts. We talked about boiled peanuts. Grits; some of them are like, they don't get grits which is interesting. But some of them are super excited to try all the southern food. They want to eat barbecue. They want to try everything. Yeah.

LR: In your position, you're sort of the face of hospitality for these students. Personally, do you have any practices that you always adhere to for being a hospitable person?

MO: That's a good question. I think at the beginning, trying just to be really understanding of just what they've gone through to actually get here both in terms of time and effort and then just the physical nature of the travel and they're exhausted and it's, it's a lot. It's overwhelming. I try to be really conscious of how I speak: the speed at which I speak, the words I use to make sure that they are understanding me as easily as possible. I'm not proficient in a foreign language, but I've been abroad enough to know how hard it is when you're translating everything in your head, you know, it's just, it's exhausting. Yeah. You always feel like you're behind. So I try to make sure at orientation, you know, what we're saying is also on the screen, you know, trying to make sure that they're able to understand as much as they can. Trying to educate them on U.S. culture as much as I can, as quickly as I can. You know, trying to- we try to highlight some of the main things about American culture early on so that hopefully it's not a shock when people are like, "Hi, how are you?" And they just keep walking and they don't want an answer, you know, those sorts of things. Just trying to... I have an understanding of what it's like to be away from home, to be in a new place to, you know.

LR: Put yourself in their shoes.

MO: Yeah. And just understand how confusing things can be. You name it, it's overwhelming. You know, immigration is confusing, trying to get a driver's license is confusing, you know, all that stuff. All the, all those basic things are confusing. I know you've lived in Europe, I mean grocery stores are different, so just everyday life can be really overwhelming. So, you know, trying to make sure that they have the time and the resources to help them get settled as soon as they can, too. That's why the Cougar Ambassador program is so important that they have somebody that could really help them with those day to day things.

LR: So you said that you consider the exchange students or the students that are staying here for a shorter term to be tourists. Do you find yourself interacting with other tourists, say like American tourists, from other cities coming into Charleston more in the recent years?

MO: A little bit when we go sort of to sites, we'll see other tourists. So that's sort of an interesting experience. Sometimes they want to know who we are with this giant group of foreign students, like "Hello, we're here at this plantation." So a little bit, but not a whole bunch. Sometimes just around campus, there'll be tourists walking around just, you know, 'cause they want to see campus. Which I don't blame them, it's beautiful. Sometimes I'll talk to them a little bit if they need help.

LR: Do they usually have...? Like what kind of things do you talk about? Questions about the school or the area?

MO: Area, school, directions. I had this tourist family asked me one time, I felt so bad for them. It was one of these super hot days in like July or August. And I was walking around campus and they stopped me in there and they asked me if there was a way to get to the Battery walking in the shade. And I was like, no. (laughter)

LR: (laughing) I guess there's the tunnel that goes right down King Street.

MO: I was like "Walk side to side, try to get under the awnings." No. Welcome to the South, like you will melt before you get there. So yeah. Yeah.

LR: So how would you say that your interactions are different with tourists, whether they're international students or they're other Americans, versus locals? Can you pick out a tourist? Even an American tourist here?

MO: Yeah, I would say not necessarily. I think... I'm trying to think, like I'll come down to the farmer's market downtown and I couldn't tell you who was necessarily an American tourist versus a local there, you know. The foreign tourists I can usually pick out. Yeah, just, you know, literally the way they carry themselves, sometimes is different. So that's really interesting. No, I wouldn't say I could pick out necessarily an American tourist.

LR: So I'm going to shift the conversation a bit to development or change in Charleston, like physically what you can see. This office here is located on Calhoun Street just next to the College. Have you seen a lot of change in this area or even above Calhoun?

MO: Yeah. I would say, when I have time, I usually walk around during lunch. And I would say you can tell that people are putting more money into the houses around here, renovating. You know, trying to keep these old houses in good shape or renovating the ones that have not been taken care of. So I would say you can see some of that. And in the neighborhood around here, it seems like there's more going on on upper King. I think probably the first two or three years we lived here, we never went up that way. And now we'll go to like Revelry and Edmond's Oast and further up to like a workshop. And that would be a part of Charleston that I didn't know anything about, you know, when I first moved here. So I would say we definitely have seen more stuff that we're interested in going up in those neighborhoods than before. A little bit in West Ashley too, there's been, you know, some changes. We're getting a Whole Foods, big deal, and just new restaurants coming in. They're trying [inaudible] in Citadel Mall that's right by our house. So it's interesting to see what they're trying to do with that space because malls, you know, people don't really go to malls anymore. Yeah.

LR: So have you noticed any changes within the College? Maybe with people's attitudes or the administration? Anything that comes to mind?

MO: Not really. I would say... It's been frustrating when sort of the bigger picture state government has sort of interfered for no reason at the College. Like thinking, in particular, of the College Reads. I can't think of the name of the graphic novel that they were freaking out about that the state government...

LR: Oh, I know what you're talking about.

MO: *Fun Home*. I was like, are you kidding me? This is ridiculous that they got all upset that we were asking freshmen to read this book that they thought was a terrible influence and shouldn't be read on a college campus and, let alone these are adults and college is supposed to be a place to explore new ideas and, and things like that. And in my mind, these close-minded state senators were getting all upset about this book. Yeah. So I think that was, it was good to see how the College reacted to that and said, "No, this is a place of learning. This is a place to explore. This is what students are brought here to do, to have these important conversations" when the state, when people in the state government, were like, "This is ridiculous." So I would say that was like, to me, that reaction from the state was not something... maybe it would have happened in Ohio, but I couldn't see it happening there. So that interaction between the state government and the College I think is really interesting. I worked at Ohio State, which was a public university, but this is the first public school I've worked at where the interaction between the state and the school is much more interconnected sometimes for no reason, you know, like why, why are they getting as involved as they are? So I think in some ways there should be a little bit more separation. You know, our Board of Trustees is a lot of people from the state government, you know, is that really necessary if there's all these state government offices that are already overseeing colleges and universities? You know, the number of permanent employees we can have at the College is determined by the state. Why does it matter if we had 200 more students? The state has to decide if we can get more full-time people. So there's just some, yeah.

LR: Do you think, have you found that other employees at the College share this opinion that you have, or do you think you're kind of out on your own?

MO: No, I think there's a lot of people who get frustrated with some of the state bureaucracy and I don't want to say interference, but with *Fun Home* it did feel like interference. Like there was a process, like a committee selected the book, like it wasn't one wacky professor who decided that this was, you know, so I think a lot of people were frustrated with that. I think the red tape can be frustrating for a lot of people, but maybe that's true at a lot of state institutions

and I just wasn't aware of it as much at Ohio State. So it's interesting. I also think the College of Charleston and Charleston in general is more liberal than the rest of the state. So coming from a liberal state and Columbus is an especially liberal city within a liberal state, we sort of get lulled into this false liberal bubble, I guess, in Charleston. And then when-

LR: Kind of forget your surroundings.

MO: Yes, and when I realized that there's all these conservative things in the state, it's a little jarring, I guess.

LR: When you step outside of the area, yeah. So going back to southern hospitality, could you tell me, do you have a definition for southern hospitality?

MO: Well, that's a good question. I think it's just the idea of being welcoming to all, being friendly, greeting people, helping them adjust and sort of find their way here. I'm trying to think. There's some stereotypical southern... I don't know, some of the times the food and like some of that stuff, I think it sort of gets tied to southern hospitality. I'm trying to think if I have any...

LR: That's okay if that's all you have to say.

MO: Yeah, that's probably...

LR: Would you say that, if I was interviewing you and couple years back when you were in Ohio, do you think you would have the same answer? Do you think that your idea of southern hospitality has shifted since you've moved here?

MO: That's a good question. Maybe a little bit. I don't think I thought about... and I think the international students' reaction to it has also helped me to better understand, like, how friendly it is, you know, like how, yes, a complete stranger will talk to you and that's not unheard of and it's, you know. I'm trying to think in Boston or Chicago if that would- not that you couldn't ask someone for help, but here, I don't know, it's just a little bit more visual. Yeah. Like it's a little more, the hospitality is a little bit more out there than in a lot of other U.S. cities I think.

LR: So working with the international students has really made you realize how different it is.

MO: Yeah, yeah. Especially for the ones who've been to the U.S. but they've only been to like New York or Disney World, you know, and then they come here and it's completely different than what they've seen of the U.S. so far.

LR: Do you think... when I think of, of New York or Disneyland, those are... People, I mean, at least in New York, people live there but it is a very, very touristy destination, much like Charleston. Charleston is huge for tourism. But do we see the difference there? Do you think that Charleston has been able to maintain its authenticity even though there are so many tourists here, just like New York? Maybe not as many.

MO: I think they really try. I think there's a big effort to maintain some of the roots and the charm of Charleston. I think about all the building regulations, you know, trying to really preserve the historic charm and features of the houses and buildings downtown of the historic center. I think you get outside of the peninsula and...

LR: It's harder.

MO: I don't know that you would know that you're in Charleston, you know? The students, the international students always comment when we get to like King Street or Meeting Street with the Palmetto trees. They're like, "Oh, now we know we're in Charleston." You know, like if you took those trees away and you just saw those buildings, you'd think you're in like a historical town. But then you add the Palmetto trees and you're like, okay, clearly I'm in the south and you know so that's sort of interesting. Yeah. They're like "We're here!" no matter how jet lagged they are as we're driving down those streets from the airport there you can see.

LR: I think everyone has that moment when they first come here. I did; I was like where am I? And then King Street: "Oh, I'm here."

MO: Yeah, you're like "Aha, this is definitely it." Yeah, for sure.

LR: So do you think in the future Charleston, will continue to maintain that authenticity or will be able to? Because there's so many, not just tourists coming in every year, but just new people moving here every day.

MO: I hope so. I think they'll have an easier time in the historic center than other places. But even... So we take the international students on a harbor cruise and the tour guide has commented about some of the really expensive houses by the Battery. A lot of them are no longer owned by people who live here full-time. Like they're rich families who buy these houses. They only come for a short amount of time. So those neighborhoods don't feel as alive as they used to because people aren't living there full-time. So that's sort of sad to me that, you know, that those neighborhoods don't have residents full-time.

LR: Do you think that those neighborhoods are better preserved though? Because maybe the families that are buying them are not southerners and if they were there you would see more change?

MO: Yeah, that's a good... I don't know. They're also not... I mean, they also have the money potentially to preserve them too. Maybe that's, you know, if that's why they're there. Hopefully that's what they're drawn to about Charleston and, you know, living in this historic city in a historic home that they would want to. Yeah. I don't know. Hm.

LR: Do you think as a, I don't know, I don't want to say non-local, but someone who isn't from Charleston, do you think that you can be part of the initiative in the future to maintain Charleston? Do you think that you've learned enough of the southern culture, or you will, that you can be a part of that? An advocate of it and produce it yourself?

MO: That's interesting. I don't know. I don't know. That's a good question. Out of most of the people I know, I would say the majority aren't from here, so I'm not... I do have two coworkers who are from Charleston, Greater Charleston and then Jessica is from a little bit further north. So we hear a little bit about... so they're sort of my in to what Charleston has sort of been like historically, or Sarah who's from Charleston, we were planning the harbor cruise and we picked the date and she goes, "Oh, that's the anniversary of Hugo." I wouldn't remember that. but for her that was a very life-changing occurrence. So, yeah, I don't know if I, if I would be able to help sort of carry that on. The physical, I mean, I would definitely advocate for the physical preservation of the city. I don't know about culturally if-

LR: If it can hold on. And, I wanted to ask you, is there a place in Charleston that maybe you first saw when you got here or found later that really means something to you or is your favorite place that hasn't changed from your perspective, you haven't seen change there or you don't think it will change in the future?

MO: So probably one of my favorite beaches is Kiawah and I think part of the reason, the county park there, part of the reason is I think because there's not all that development like around the beach and you can actually be on the beach and just see nature. So that's what my favorite place is. The same with, not quite, but the county park at Folly, too, like, that there's not built up. I feel like it's hard to sort of get into nature and forget your surroundings here. Those are two favorite places. I really liked Cypress Gardens and then it got hit by the hurricane, so we haven't been back. But that was a really cool experience. The Angel Oak tree. Beautiful. Hopefully that won't change. Hopefully the tree will keep going.

LR: So we'll see about those places hopefully they'll stay the same.

MO: Yeah. Yeah. I hope that it's, I think it's... I feel like there's not a lot of long-term planning for development and there's more talk of preserving historic places versus preserving nature and natural environments and you know, they just keep building all these houses further and further out and a lot of them, you know, with climate change, global warming, all that stuff, you know, they're building on areas that are wetlands. Right, right.

LR: So I just have one last question. Do you have a vision for the future of Charleston or something that you're hoping to see, maybe developers that will look farther into the future or something else?

MO: Public transportation. Efficient, useful public transportation would be huge and is really needed here. And trying to figure out how to counteract the impacts of climate change and flooding. You know, if you look at the predictions of sea level rise, the College of Charleston is going to be underwater.

LR: What are they saying, 30 years?

MO: This part of the peninsula, not as much, but a little bit further out than that. And you know, I'm looking at all the new buildings that they're building at MUSC and down there. I'm like, do you know how close you are to the flood- I mean, you're in a floodplain.

LR: And even we're on artificial fill. Right?

MO: Yeah, I don't know if this part of the peninsula, but a lot of it is yeah.

LR: Down by the market.

MO: So just why?

LR: The city can only bear so much of that.

MO: Yeah. And not that, you know, I mean, you want hospitals close to where people are living, but do we need these two massive, massive hospitals on the peninsula? I don't know that we do.

LR: We have two now, right?

MO: So MUSC is just adding. They're building a huge- the children's and I mean it's great, but does it need to be on the peninsula? Does it need to be in a flood zone? Does it, you know, is that really the most responsible thing that they could have done? I don't know that it is, you

know. I think the flooding last week, people are really upset about just what happens to Charleston and just, it's called rainy day flooding. I don't know if you've heard that concept... or no sunny day flooding, sorry. Like you'll see flooded streets when there's no rain because the tides get so high, you know, so like is anyone paying attention? This is happening.

LR: It's starting with the edges and only working its way inland.

MO: So I hope that they think about how they need to address that, and development in general is a big... You know, it's something that they need to be thinking more long-term about. You know, if you keep building on places where, you know, if you build on wetlands that are supposed to absorb some of that storm impact. If we have a hurricane, are we thinking about that? Where are all these people going to work and live and drive?

LR: Do you see yourself leaving Charleston one day if these things don't change?

MO: I don't know if we'd leave necessarily because of that, but leaving because of the education system, leaving because my husband and I both work in higher ed and basically if we're in Charleston or not working at the College, there's not very many other options for us, so I don't think we would be here a long-term which is sad and exciting all at the same time. So I hope they get it figured out.

LR: Whether you stay.

MO: Yeah. We have to remain hopeful.

LR: Well, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for sitting down with me. I appreciate it.

MO: You're welcome. Yeah, no problem.