

Transcription of interview between Ryan Goldberg and Gina Heredea on 4/11/14

Ryan: Let's just get this on, okay. This is my start of the interview with (pause) Gina Heredea. Today is April 11th, it's about 8:15 at night, it's on a Friday and we're gonna start her interview. (Pause) Hi Gina!

Gina: Hi Ryan!

Ryan: So where were you born and raised?

Gina: Beius, Romania¹

Ryan: Beius, Romania, okay, where is that relative to the rest of the country?

Gina: Northwest part of Romania²

Ryan: Northwest, okay

Gina: Close to Hungary

Ryan: Close to Hungary, so what was life like growing up as a child in Romania?

Gina: Wonderful

Ryan: Wonderful?³

Gina: Wonderful not knowing other type of life.

Ryan: Not knowing other type of life referring to, um, the life that you experienced here in the United States or just life elsewhere?

Gina: Referring to the whole world when you live in a country that's blocking you to know only what they offer, you just don't know any other thing, so you're happy with what you have.⁴

¹ Gina was born April 25th, 1975 in Beius Romania. She was born to Aurelia and Maximilian Heredea along with her older brother Marius. Gina lived in Beius from birth until the age of 14.

² Bihor County

³ Gina's expression and body emotion changed at this point. Before and at the beginning of the interview she seemed nervous and more reserved than her usual demeanor. When I brought up her childhood she seemed calmer and more interested in our interview.

⁴ During much of her childhood, Gina lived under a communist regime. On the Global Museum of Communism website University of Maryland professor of politics Vladimir Tismaneanu writes of a Romanian communism that started in 1921 and ended in 1989: Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Unflinching Stalinism: Communism in Romania* (Global Museum of Communism, 2009)

Ryan: Could you, um, could you tell me about a personal experience you had when you were growing up as a child? It could involve maybe some sort of friendships you had, some sort of activities you participated in.

Gina: What age?

Ryan: When you were child before you moved to Oradea⁵, when you were (pause) before you were teenager, how about that?

Gina: I could say that life was mainly based on school time and then play time that's all I remember.

Ryan: School time and play time?

Gina: Yeah and school was with no obligations, no stress and I will come home eat lunch and then I would be safely playing on the streets with other kids and I could share the playground and I could share the streets and I could share friends, neighbors houses just like I'd share my own space at home.⁶

Ryan: You're smiling, you look like you really missed it.

Gina: Of course, I love my childhood.

Ryan: When you were a teenager, you moved to, uh, Oradea.

Gina: O-ra-dea⁷, yup

Ryan: Oh, Oradea, Oradea

Gina: Oradea

Ryan: So what was life like there? How was it different from when you lived ... where did you live initially?

Gina: Bei-us, Bei-us, B-E ... you want to write it?

⁵ Gina lived in Oradea from the age of 14 (1989) until her immigration at the age of 24 (1999). There is where she attended secondary school, university, and practiced physical therapy for 2 years.

⁶ Gina continued to smile when referencing her childhood, this is a theme I would continue to reference back to for the entire interview.

⁷ Gina pronounces Oradea so I am able to refer to it correctly.

Ryan: Sure

Gina: B-E-I-U-S, Beius

Ryan: Beius

Gina: Mm-hmm, that's a small town, but I would compare Beius to Oradea like, um, Tenaflly with, uh, New York City⁸

Ryan: Okay, got it, okay

Gina: Because to me Oradea was a New York City at that time.⁹

Ryan: Relatively it was huge compared to where you are living was, um-

Gina: It's like you're going up Tenaflly to New York

Ryan: That's too funny

Gina: (Laughs)

Ryan: So what was life like here? How is it different?

Gina: In Oradea?

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: First of all getting out from my small world, it was a little challenging I should say. Number one not living with your parents anymore, having to live in a dorm with other people so it was, a challenge to share ...

Ryan: So- (interrupting)

Gina: ... your space, your life with another (counting on her fingers) four people in the same room.

⁸ Gina references Tenaflly, a New Jersey suburb of New York City. This is where my family and my self live and where Gina lived while working for us as a live-in housekeeper.

⁹ Gina is referencing how much larger and busier Oradea was to Beius. She does so by referencing Tenaflly, a small town to New York city, a metropolis.

Ryan: As you were saying to me before when you were in, (pause) what did you call your secondary school or high school?

Gina: It was high school.

Ryan: What did you call your high school?

Gina: Yeah, the 14 'til 18 that's a high school but it was a high school that, uh-

Ryan: A dorm, you lived there, correct?

Gina: Yeah, but it's also a tough high school that ... after high school had a license to practice nursing so it was on top of high school ...

Ryan: Oh

Gina: ... uh, curriculum. We had also this extra hour, so I will go to school from eight to four, tough time, uh, so it was hard, it was very hard.¹⁰

Ryan: Interesting, um, I didn't realize that the, uh, that your high school education system actually almost set you up for profession; is that something you specifically chose to do or that was, very common in Romania?

Gina: No, actually I don't know. It was my destiny.

Ryan: Really?

Gina: It was my little angel¹¹. Nobody actually sent me to that school and my mother suffered a lot that I did leave her at age 14. No, at that time under communism, actually the end of communism was when I entered the ninth grade, age 14.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: So before I passed,¹² I went ... I entered that program that's was still under communism and I just choose to go there for, I don't know, the reasons of

¹⁰ Gina attended a boarding school in the city of Beius. This school specialized in teaching as well as nursing. Romania's education system is largely different from that of the United States. At the completion of 4 years and at the age of 18, Gina and her classmates became either certified nurses or physical therapists.

¹¹ Referring to physical therapy

¹² Referring to the testing needed to be accepted into her secondary school

doing a good ... pursuing a good school, so at that time well the system did offer two ... for that level of age, you had two options, either to go to pedagogical little school or, uh, sanitary, nursing. I don't know the name in English for it, but after you completed these four years high school ...

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: You are either, uh, depending on the high school, you could either be a nurse or you could be a teacher for first to fourth grade.

Ryan: Okay

Gina: With no college

Ryan: No college?

Gina: No-

Ryan: So you could go ...

Gina: Yup, you could¹³-

Ryan: Automatically, directly ...

Gina: At age 18

Ryan: Out of high school go directly into the working world at age 18?

Gina: Yup, yup, yup

Ryan: That's really interesting.

Gina: So at age 14, I was learning how to give injections.

Ryan: Wow

Gina: At age 15, I learned how to withdraw blood. At age 16, I witnessed deliveries and all of that, mm-hmm.

Ryan: That's wild. And you did a secondary education too after high school, correct?

¹³ Referring to the workforce, specifically nursing and teaching

Gina: (Laughter) during the high school?

Ryan: After high school?

Gina: After high school, no, and so I never practiced nursing and I went (pause to think) after college I went straight to PT school to physical therapy.¹⁴

Ryan: Okay

Gina: Thus my little angel

Ryan: After college you went to physical therapy?

Gina: No, that's why I asked you before about school here because over there school means in Romania at that time even now these days, college ... you enter college and you pretty much know your major. So you might go for medical school at six, uh, six total years. You don't go for liberal arts and other subjects for three years

Ryan: You specify first ... okay

Gina: You first have to indicate you want to be a doctor, you go to medical school; you want to be a dentist, you go to dentistry; you want to go to ... to be a PT, right after college, it's a very tough exam but to enter the program but then you go on that specific curriculum from the beginning. You know what you're gonna be or what the school takes you to in life.¹⁵

Ryan: And what was, uh, what was your experience like not necessarily educationally but socially while you're, um, living in Oradea? Was it more cultured than you were from, then were you more exposed to art, music? Could you tell me more about some of those experiences?

Gina: Yes and no. Uh, art, yeah more exposure I should say than little town where I grew up, where I was raised and born, but I think the age didn't live ... let us do much of that at that time. It was a lot of school, a lot of education, tough school like I said before and, uh, besides that it was just little time left for fun

¹⁴ Directly after high school or secondary school, Gina attended the University of Oradea where Gina was the first class of Romanian students to pursue a degree in physical therapy. Relative to the United States this would be as if a 19 year old was attending graduate school.

¹⁵ Gina is referencing the Romanian school system and how it forces a student into a major or specification at such a young age. The integration of the educational and professional system works so that a person is expected to start earning a living at the age of 20.

and I think we'll just ... socially we'll just keep our time in between the dorm time or outdoors of trip here and there, but everything else actually at that age probably would behave the way how kids behave here in college, the party, the smoking, the drinking all that.¹⁶

Ryan: Oh the fun stuff.

Gina: It was at age 14, 15, 16, 17, yeah.

Ryan: That's well.

Gina: And you continue to the college.

Ryan: Which makes sense, it seems like, um, it seems like you start things earlier because you're also, um, progressing into your career earlier.

Gina: Correct

Ryan: So the time period where people are ... uh, people of my age would be going out and having fun, you were actually, um, starting your job and starting your life and occupation?

Gina: Correct, very good point actually, true.

Ryan: It's very interesting, I never thought about ... I like that.

Gina: So but this aside you see, you cant (pause) you cant compare the society actually ... not actually that forces you but manipulates you to fit into that phase of your life ...

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: So you (pause) you have to be prepared by age 20 to have an income.

Ryan: Did you ... do you think that's, uh, too young of an age to be able to make that decision?

¹⁶ Here is where I clarified with Gina the integration between education and social time. Here Gina states that her college experience was difficult and strenuous. She explains to me how high school acted more as a fun social time rather than in college. Later we discuss that this as a major theme to Romanian culture which focuses on the responsibilities of young Romanian's.

Gina: I don't think I missed anything. If I look back I wouldn't do differently. I don't think it ... it was hard, but I think it would have been just the same at different age.

Ryan: Interesting, so-

Gina: It makes you definitely more mature, more, uh, responsible because, it falls a lot on your shoulders.

Ryan: Well, if you compare relatively to the (pause) the people your age who grew up in America, in the United States the responsibility you had when you were 18 years old far (pause) it seems like it far exceeded what you would be doing if you're an 18-year-old, uh, in the United States.

Gina: True

Ryan: Very interesting

Um, tell me about practicing faith in Romania. Um, what was that like for you? Was it a different experience than you would think that, uh, other people experienced? Tell me a little bit about it.

Gina: Um, unfortunately being under communism, we're not allowed to practice any faith¹⁷ but being a child I didn't sense that. Growing up and being, I mean, sensing both eras of being under communism and under democracy and then coming here, um, I never felt the, that I (pause) I was forced to do things in a simple way and I actually I have been raised very, I don't know, with a free-spirit, open-minded ... by open-minded parents, uh, however, I did not see in my family the faith that I actually learned through all my life on my own.

Ryan: You felt that because of the ... because of, communism in the way your country was run-

Gina: I think they were affected by the communism more than the past¹⁸

¹⁷ During Gina's life as well as the entire period which the communist party has had control of Romania, there has been religious persecution. Christians throughout the entire country have been subject to kidnapping, torture, and for many execution or disappearance. In an article titled *The War on Religion*, Grove City College professor Paul Kengor describes some of the torture, "Christians were tied to crosses for days and nights." This scene was very common at Romanian "labor" camps: Paul Kengor, *The War on Religion* (The Global Museum on Communism, 2007) pg. 2

¹⁸ Gina is referring to how her parents had their religious freedom taken from them while she was simply born without them. "Not knowing from anything else" will be a continued theme during the interview.

Ryan: Your ... your parents were affected?

Gina: Exactly so-

Ryan: And because of that you were unable to develop faith with your parents rather you had to go and do it on your own?¹⁹

Gina: Well, I think as the time came in life that makes you be more connected to God. I think you just choose your own way of behaving and it doesn't matter where you are, you will do. So I could say about myself that here is when I became closer to my religion. Not that I was stopped to do it in Romania by anyone, parents or society at that time, but I can remember as a child not ... my parents being very busy with taking care of us and going to work, I never said mom, let's go to church on Sunday but I would go in spring breaks to grandma in the village in the simple world and she will go to the church every single Sunday.

And she will ... at night time she will not care if I'll go to sleep at 10 PM or 2 AM and she'll read stories from the bible to me.

Ryan: Interesting

Gina: And I remember actually, by the way, her best friend because my grandpa passed away early in age 60 I think, um, she was by herself and her very close and the best friend she had, uh, God rest him in peace, he was actually a Jewish man.²⁰

Ryan: Interesting

Gina: But we didn't call him Jewish, we call him I think Sambata that would mean the people of Shabbat.

Ryan: The people of Shabbat?

Gina: Shabbat ...

¹⁹ I interrupted Gina having background knowledge that Gina attends church and is active within her religion now that she lives in the United States.

²⁰ Gina mentioned this part because of her knowledge of my family and our faith. She did not have an active part within our Judaism but has become accustomed to our traditions simply by spending time with my family.

Ryan: (Laughing) that's very ... that's very funny.

Gina: Of course they're the ones that celebrate ... Saturday not Sunday.²¹

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: And you should hear that's how I learned about religion actually.

Ryan: Okay

Gina: If I would go back, I would see this to all people reading, she will read to him from the New Testament and he would read to her from the Old Testament so they'll just discuss about the whole Bible and then they will listen, uh, hiding to the, I think it was called Free Europe²², have you heard about that, uh, that radio station?

Ryan: I have not.

Gina: So under communism you're not allowed to do anything ...

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: But what our president told and that's all.

Ryan: Exactly

Gina: So there's a kind of special wave there in the radio that you probably steal²³, once they did, but you will hear the word from, uh, European station and they will hear and they will listen every night up to midnight hiding.

Ryan: Interesting

²¹ Gina is referring to the Jewish tradition of the Sabbath which starts and ends at night fall each Friday and Saturday evening.

²² Gina is referring to popular cold war radio station, Radio Free Europe. This radio station, "provided an unbiased, professional substitute for the free media that countries behind the curtain lacked." This is where many communist countries were able to receive news and current events when their country may have heavy censorship.

²³ Gina is referring stealing by intercepting a radio signal that is illegally broadcasted into the country. This was very common all over communist controlled Europe.

Gina: So that was ... that was my exposure actually to religion through my grandma, in the house, in her house and then probably I don't remember exactly when I went to church was it under ... oh, yeah, as a kid I remember being a child celebrating Easter or Christmas so that was under communism. But it wasn't so much into my family like it is these days for example so I'm sure my parents had been, um, definitely influenced by the communism.

I don't think so just because I grew up with a banana or an orange or winter that was just okay with me (laughter) and have a cake made by my mom every Saturday that was fun.²⁴ We're playing in the ... dirt outside. I was just ... well, I'm not washing my hands every other three hours perfect (laughter). I will not change my childhood at all.

Ryan: That's great. Could you tell me what, life was like socially in Romania. You had, um, you spent up until the age, uh, what age specifically you left-

Gina: When I came here?

Ryan: When you came here

Gina: 24, 24

Ryan: You're 24, so your entire development of your life socially when you would be making friendships and meeting people. Um, what was life like developing friendships? Do you still have some of those friendships, um, now? Have some of the ... your friends moved to United States, who migrated to the United States like you have?

Gina: Nope, um, I would say now at age 39 that the friends you make at certain stages of life²⁵, they're the real friends that you will have forever.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: I'd say the friends I made these days although there are Romanians or not Romanians, it's different. E- every stage of life comes with different benefits or inconveniences. So, uh, friendship, yeah, I can say high school ... if I look back I can tell you about at least three different group of friends because I

²⁴ This was an activity Gina and her mother did in place of the time they would be going to church.

²⁵ Gina is referring her friendships she has made at different years and stages of his life rather than just during adolescents or teen years. Her opportunities and friendships have largely extended to the United States even though she keeps close ties with many Romanians.

grew up with certain people in Beius that go into high school. I had friends from high school but also friends from the dorm.²⁶

Truthfully, actually I don't ... I'm not in touch with the high school people. Via Facebook these days, yeah, hello we're happy to see each other actually, I had friends from high school who are doctors in all over Europe.

Ryan: Interesting

Gina: So I am but ... I'm just at a Facebook level that's all, but the friends I made in, uh, high school two friends, we can meet today and we'll just start again from where we left it. It's just like, um, sibling.

Ryan: That's great and I mean-

Gina: And they're there ... they're all there.²⁷

Ryan: They all live there now?

Gina: This ... the probably the-

Ryan: They're all doctors there or nurses there or teachers?

Gina: Well, all kinds of ... yeah, from lawyers, doctors, all kinds. Some of them they stayed PT but because the physical therapy is not appreciated in Romania, they changed fields but I ... I'm in touch mostly with the high school friends. They're college friends.

Ryan: So you said physical therapy is not appreciated in Romania. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Gina: That's number one reason why I left. Well, unfortunately it was (pause) it's a field (pause) it's, a profession that was not, uh, existing in Romania. It was, um, at a lower level of education. It wasn't a college degree. It didn't require college degree up to the point, I think I've started in 1993- ... I was a second duration so the curriculum of a normal recognized worldwide physical therapy program was just starting a year before my duration, so I was the second duration with physical therapy and unfortunately three years there, it

²⁶ Gina is referring to the secondary school she attended while practicing to be a nurse in Oradea. This was from the ages of 14-18.

²⁷ Gina is referring how all of her friends from her young years remain in Romania.

stopped and that's just because of the wonderful system we have²⁸, the education, and politics and corruption and if you just don't fight for your own interest, you don't get anywhere, but I was just lucky enough to be part of a great curriculum which held me carry, learn ... have it learned it, and carried me through all the life and being recognized here with hard work but so-

Physical therapy is just something temporary that existed in Romania and I'll give you a simple example and you will understand, to graduate from physical therapy school, to help profession in your hand and then you go to hospital to apply for a job and they don't have on the list of jobs the name of your title so they couldn't hire you because they don't have that position so then you go-

Ryan: So you noticed-

Gina: You knock at the labor of department or labor of work ... labor department, right?

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: Where they have the listing of all the jobs in the country and didn't exist so how can you have, uh, a curriculum of college degree, a program in university accepted in Romania so the ministry of education has this program and yet the ministry of employment of labor whatever it is, they don't have the job for you so you create jobs for who?

Ryan: For nothing

Gina: For nothing

Ryan: Yeah

Gina: So luckily it wasn't that I had to pay for it, it's free. School at that time was still free in the states, still free in Romania. Actually if you're good, you get the money.²⁹

²⁸ Here Gina is referring to the corruption, which has lead to many failed projects and programs within Romania. What affected her specifically were the flaws in the health care field. This is one of the primary reasons as to why Gina immigrated to the United States. Gina was unable to get a job practicing physical therapy because there was not such occupation in the country. Her program folded shortly after her graduation and that concluded physical therapy in Romania. Gina is now referring to the corruption in Romania many years after the communism was ousted.

²⁹ Scholarships in Romania were not the same as they are here in the United States because education was public and free. Despite they awarded scholarships that could be used for everyday necessities.

Ryan: That's great

Gina: (Laughs)

Ryan: Um, will you-

Gina: So I love my work. I love my ... my, uh, profession. I loved it from day one and, uh, I was very disappointed when I had the reality of, uh, living there.

Ryan: When reality set in and you did move to this country, did you ... um, did you see differences in the practices the way they did it in the United States compared to Romania? Did you have any trouble potentially, um, having credibility coming from a different country and trying to work here? What was that like for you?

Gina: There are two aspects. First of all in Romania the curriculum that I, um, had in my ... in my program was built on ... on, um, program from Europe and United States.

Ryan: Okay

Gina: Whoever was in charge in building up that ... that curriculum, like we learned everything almost like here so I was very exposed already by that time we had computers not that I was allowed to use them but I had the information of books.³⁰ I would read in English and translate and understand what's going on or the teachers or professors will ... they will all be doctors and they would translate from ... so I learned physical therapy from United States ...

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: And that's what was my education and yet the kids, people who could somehow enter into these hospitals and work, they couldn't practice, wouldn't have orthotics, simple example, how can you help a kid if you don't have ... nobody makes orthotics? That's very first year or even five years after that the year of graduation. Simple things like that like physical therapy. We didn't have that so you don't have the equipment. Forget about your skill hands on, nobody appreciate so you do ... do work here and there but when nobody gives you a salary for that, nobody even understands what you're doing. The doctor doesn't value your work, he doesn't refer a stroke, fresh

³⁰ Much like many other communist countries, technology was outdated and heavily restricted.

stroke person to you to ... to be held through physical therapy.³¹ How ... how are you, officially, how are you valid and may ...

Ryan: It must have been very discouraging.

Gina: Yup, so that's why my reason why I knew I could do what I do. I loved what I did, what I learned and what I could do and then I just didn't even look left or right to check things closer to home which is Europe. Europe has great programs, Belgium, France, like with England. No, I just looked at the top.

Ryan: (Laughs) and you ended up here.

Gina: I know, I didn't see any differences here because well it was a major of obstacle here³² because in United States in this profession they easily ... if you come from a, um, recognized program by United States like people from Philippines, they have schools, university which are already approved by United States probably they have enough students already coming there, educated in Philippines and the school is already recognized by United States.

So if you come from one of these schools all over the world, it's so easy by state you're being recognized. All you have to do to comply with the (pause) the regulations of the state and pass your, (pause) the national PT exam³³ to be able to practice, but where I came from nobody heard about that program, so it took me two years with the help of my roommates at that time to go word-by-word, course-by-course translation, bring it to Romania.

Luckily, I worked two years actually before I came here in ... in the university so I tried different jobs including teaching at the university, so I was close in touch with my ex-colleagues and they helped me out through all this paperwork to be approved and they still ... these days they still use. They still have the ... what's that diskette, disk ... how is the old fashioned non-CD?

Ryan: Floppy disk

³¹ Gina expresses her frustration that physical therapy was inexistent in all aspects of Romanian healthcare.

³² Gina is trying to express how difficult it was to come to and become a physical therapist in the United States coming from Romania. She refers to many other European countries, which have partnerships and act as feeder schools into American healthcare. These opportunities were not offered coming from Romania.

³³ Gina is referring to The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy exam.

Gina: Floppy disk, it's floppy, yeah, they still have that cause I created that here and that is still being used as the course description for the program we ... we entered.

Ryan: Okay, very interesting.

Changing it up a little bit. Tell me about, what's the family dynamic like in Romania? Um, how is this ... how is this compared to yours?³⁴

Gina: In Romania compared ... compared to what?

Ryan: How is ... what ... what's the typical family life like (pause) how is the family organized typical ...

Gina: Oh, in my-

Ryan: In that of children then compare that to the upbringing you had?

Gina: So my personal (life)?

Ryan: Mm-hmm, if you would like to.

Gina: Yeah, yeah, no. I think growing up I didn't see so much difference around me. We're all pretty much the same. Like I've seen now a lot of difference and not actually because of United States.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: Even there and even between my relatives, I see a lot of differences but growing up we're pretty much the same whether I think about people from Beius or Oradea so it didn't really matter. I think it was a stage of Romania. It's ... it was pretty much the same at that time. It was loving and caring and simplicity and respect for parents and safety.

Ryan: As it should be.

Gina: And safety on the streets. You could go by yourself to school and not to be transported by your parent in the car which happens these days. Nobody goes to school by foot these days.

Ryan: Nope

³⁴ I was asking Gina if her family fit the typical family roles in Romania.

Gina: (Laughs) and yet boys and girls are holding hands at age 12.³⁵ I don't know holding hand on the street at age 18. You're gonna make fun of me I know but that's how it is now.

Ryan: Do you remember when I used to walk to school, I used to ride my bike to school too.

Gina: Yup

Ryan: We lived so close³⁶. It seems like, um ... it seems like you had so many different reasons to come to this country, but there's just like a very big part of you that wishes you were still the same kid playing on the street with your friends and it seems that you have more opportunities here, but life was very more simpler over there.

Gina: I think if you want ... yeah, true, correct, but it's ... what you grow with, it's who you are and you cannot change that and luckily if you have good experiences in life I think it's a ... a great benefit through all your life but they can be bad. I don't look backwards and regret a second of being here but as an adolescent, later on adult, it was extremely hard for me to cope with the reality of that close world, extremely hard.

Because just imagine that up to age 14, you don't even leave unite- ... uh, your country, just don't know that more than Romania exists. You know from geography but you don't travel, you can't, you're not allowed to.³⁷ And that's all we can and then you go cross the border and you see light on the street like, wow, light on the street. That's a shocking moment at age 14 to see such a difference, so you realize how behind you are in your own country. And unfortunately that country and I know Hungary is behind Romania but that ... that's-

Ryan: Which is I never thought about that-

³⁵ Gina is comparing the maturity of adolescents sexually in Romania compared to the United States. She believes that the United States young adults develop more quickly than those in Romania.

³⁶ I am referencing the proximity from my house in Tenafly NJ to my elementary school. It was no more than a 10 minute walk or a short bike ride, Gina and I would do it nearly every day.

³⁷ Under the communist regime leaving Romania was a privilege, one that was extremely uncommon for those not of extreme wealth or political affiliation. In an article printed by Oxford University, it speaks about the Romanian Revolution in 1989 and the changes that occurred. "In December 1989, the communist regime in Romania, like so many in the region, fell. As it fell, the borders opened for the first time in decades." B. Michalon, *The Control of Migration in Post-Communist Romania* (London, University of Oxford, 2013)

- Gina: That's ... that's how it worked, that was my very first exposure to the west.
- Ryan: So when you were ... when you were being, uh, when you're being raised, when you're and living in Romania, you felt that (pause) you felt and it was that your country was significantly ... significantly behind not only, um, modern western technology in western living but the countries that were all around you?
- Gina: Yup so between ... from the end of communism until which was when I was 14 ...
- Ryan: So it's 19- ... 1990
- Gina: Until the 24 when I came here-
- Ryan: Until, yeah
- Gina: So it was '89 to '99, '89 is when we had the revolution, '99 is when I came so I actually spent 10 years, high school, college and two years of working and it was exactly 10 years of me growing up as a human being³⁸ cause it's the time in life that you'll develop and you do the best you can I guess to ... to try to be who you want to be in life and it came with great experiences but ... but the end of it when I really had to be what I wanted to be, I realized that my place ... I don't belong at all there, but we within these years, all these 10 years it was not just the ... the challenge of moving from home, moving out ... it was the challenge of two programs which I had to, uh, complete.³⁹ I choose to complete. And then number three it was this brutal exposure to the limitations of what this country offered us and even these days, unfortunately, and again the people have to leave because that country does not support them.
- Ryan: Still the same way?
- Gina: Mainly ... mainly financially because, you know, we all have to live. Luckily in my situation, I ... that's not my reason of leaving my country. But a lot of people forget about what they want to do in their life or what profession they

³⁸ Gina continues to credit her youth and being young in general. It has shown as a trend in the interview and left me inclined to believe that she was interested in making a long term return to Romania.

³⁹ Gina is referring to both her programs at her nursing program at secondary school and physical therapy school at University of Oradea.

want to pursue or education they need to live and they need money and the country does not offer you that.

Ryan: So we're while on money, can you tell me a little bit about the economic system the Romania ...

Gina: At Romania?

Ryan: ... had both during, um, both before and after the, uh ...

Gina: Communism

Ryan: ... communist regime and communism?

Gina: On one hand, under communism I think it ... just like I said before when you don't know anything else, it's ...

Ryan: Seems okay

Gina: Right, it's always seems okay, you can't compare.⁴⁰ So the fact that you have a gallon of oil per month or per week for your family, everything is a portioned size given to you by number of family members. Um, I think the system just forced you to be limited that's all. You couldn't even go beyond limit. So you don't know anything else, you can't compare, it's okay. But once you see more, it's very frustrating and especially when you know you can work because you are hardworking or your brain can do more than average people or you just have desires or god forbid you're an artist, I think you easily destroy yourself there because you really can do what you want.

Um, the system wise, communism... democracy, it's hard to say that under democracy it's easier or better because if before you're limited but happy because you didn't have choices but you didn't know more, now you have but you can't pursue them,⁴¹ whatever you want, you choose. You have to be ... can I use bad words?⁴²

Ryan: You can say whatever you'd like.

⁴⁰ The inability to compare her life style to anything else, restrictions stemming from communism seemed normal. The theme of "not knowing anything else" continues to show throughout the interview.

⁴¹ Gina is referring to the large-scale unemployment issue while referencing the country's complete lack of physical therapy positions.

⁴² Gina was curious to know if she could curse, which she was reluctant to do anyway.

- Gina: Um, you have to be cruel, you have to be corruptive, you have to just do bad things to ... to survive. And if you have, um, like a bad ...
- Ryan: Could you give some (examples)
- Gina: ... talking badly about Romania, but probably people in the capital in Romania, a lot of people there they ... they might do very well financially but it's not necessary based on their education or more of that. It's all about corruption.
- Ryan: Can you give some examples of that corruption?
- Gina: Of course, someone need somebody having money in opening up a hospital, that's all, but you because you are from northwest part of Romania, you will never have the money to enter or I don't know it's just I ... it's hard for me to give examples because I haven't been part of that.⁴³
- Ryan: Mm-hmm
- Gina: I ... I grew up in a world that was ... had values and my parents never had to ... to ... to back for whatever I had to get, but in my own college group of people, we were probably 20 or 24 students in that generation in physical therapy. I knew 10 of them. They're there just because their parents paid for the school.⁴⁴ How terrible is that? And then if that is to enter a program, a college level, what about when you get you get a job even these days I hear stories about, uh, the parents paying money to get into a position to have a job and then probably pay off that amount of money for the next five years.
- And just to me ... to me that's not life. Okay, it doesn't matter what happens, I just like I never had to go through it so the thing that had to happen and used to happen at that time.
- Ryan: So you're now talking at the extreme wealth, how about, um, but there are a lot of people that were really impoverished. Did you see a lot of poverty, poor people, um, homelessness in Romania?⁴⁵

⁴³ Gina constantly refers to the corruption that occurred while she was a child. She continues to reference the government as if was a higher power or a rule book rather than government or law.

⁴⁴ When Gina says, "paid for the school" she literally means that many of her classmate's families funded her secondary school.

⁴⁵ I asked this question specifically because despite all the limitations Romanians had, Gina never portrayed her citizens as if they were suffering.

Gina: Homeless is not, but poverty, yeah, but I think poverty is being taken... easier there because a lot of people don't ever get in their lifetime to have work or seen work that's why I think now under democracy just because they see the difference a little bit, they ... they are exposed to a little more they realized how hard it is, but they probably had the same life under communism, but they didn't realize it because a lot more people were like them.⁴⁶ But I don't know exactly the definition of proper ... pro- ... poverty for Romanians. I ... I don't see ... I don't recall homeless people actually.

Ryan: Interesting

Gina: Poverty ... I think people are, uh, are ... are better with the ... they're self-sufficient. They really know how to keep the cycle of not wasting or, uh, investing in only things that they do need not because they wanted.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: So that's pretty much the life would be.

Ryan: And it seems ... do you think that way is because initially even if they didn't want something, they weren't able to ... normally get it?

Gina: They were raised like that and that's to me is a positive thing.⁴⁷

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: If I have it in me... I think it's ... it's ... many times I feel myself blessed that I have both exposures in my life so far.

Ryan: It's really interesting when I think about it.

Gina: Yup, it's very simple to ... I will never forget when I came to United States and my first roommate was just coming out of college. She had a certain income and she planned her life day one. Uh, I need this car, I need that, I need this

⁴⁶ Here Gina is inferring that the fall of communism may have lead to much poverty in Romania. She also mentions that the term "poverty" could represent a different meaning in Romania as it does in the United States

⁴⁷ Gina is once again is sharing what she sees as the benefits of communism. She believes that the Romanian simple lifestyle during the regime made Romanians more resilient and less dependent.

and I need that, so I have to go for a job to ask for this income, like what?⁴⁸ So here I am saving a dollar in three hours and four dollars having ... and saving a car and then I start from there. Okay, I can afford that kind of car, I can afford that vantage-

Ryan: Now ... now you got the Passat ... before you got the blue⁴⁹ ...

Gina: It's exactly the-

Ryan: (Laughs)

Gina: But even there we learned from each other. I will never forget my sweet friend Nadia, I'm still in touch with her and we kind of, uh, congratulated each other the way how we learned from each other.

Ryan: So it's almost-

Gina: Like after three years living there when I got my studio, she came to me and she said, Gina, I know you have to put a down payment. She said, uh, if you need money, look, I have a saving of \$6,000 and that's just because of you. I'm like, what (laughs) that's very sweet and yet I also learned from her that it's ... it's good to enjoy yourself sometimes, which I've never had done before in Romania. Like, you know, you just feel like throwing \$100 and have a great night now once a year or whatever, it's not the end of the world. I would have never done that before, so-

Ryan: It's interesting. It's kind of like ... you would never think that the, you would never think that some of the values of communism but actually reflect on you, um, in a good way so ...

Gina: In a positive who I am.

⁴⁸ Here Gina is referencing "Nadia" her first roommate. What she is trying to convey here are the differences between Gina and her roommate even though they both in similar stages in their lives. Both recent graduates, Gina explains how Nadia had focuses beyond pursuing an occupation she loves. Gina believes that because of the way she was raised that may have caused her to not want desires such as an expensive car or other material possessions. She continues to explain how she would be more reluctant to spend money rather than save it. I personally know that much of the saving Gina does goes towards traveling. Having to be confined for much of her life in Romania has given Gina a great desire to travel.

⁴⁹ Gina and I are laughing because we are referring to Gina's first car, it was a '99 Ford Taurus station wagon. We referred to this car as the "blue piece of junk" because of its constant breakdowns and faded blue coat. Gina currently drives a 2012 Volkswagen Passat.

Ryan: The values of the ... the corrupt system that you were talking about that made you leave the country in the first place or actually the values that you were developed on, you grew on, and it seems like you live with them today.⁵⁰

Gina: Yeah, true. Well, honestly, the (pause) the living and tuning to do what I did so far in life, I truly believe it's part of destiny. I just don't go really by ... I don't blame the system⁵¹ honestly and I'll give you two examples. The fact that, uh, physical therapy, the curriculum that I could be part of and take advantage of it and be approved here with hard work but still yet be approved, it was in place. It was used just for five generation that's all. These days you go there, you go to school, you don't get into this program. So what's the point of being a physical therapist, to be in Romania and try to come to United States? No way, no way, so I was part of that five years, why? I don't know.⁵²

Number two, I came to United States in 1999. In 2000, Clinton gave an amnesty⁵³-

Ryan: I didn't know that.

Gina: Saying that any immigrant with or without papers, right to work if you have a sponsor and if you can prove that you are here working in the United States, you can apply for your green card. Again, with hard work of nine years, but I was here at that moment. I could been here before, I could been here after. I would have not been part of it. Since 19- ... since 2000 there's no amnesty. No, no possibility for immigrants to take advantage of it. So these two major things-

⁵⁰ Here is where I have truly realized the positive effect communism had on Gina's life. I have now seen that there are great values to be learned under oppression.

⁵¹ When referring to "the system" Gina is referencing the political, social, and economic machine that was the communist party.

⁵² Gina is once again referencing her physical therapy education at University of Oradea whose program ultimately folded. Additionally she is referencing her inability to pursue physical therapy in Romania because of its lack of recognition.

⁵³ In 2000, President Bill Clinton passed Amnesty No. 7: LIFE ACT Amnesty, 2000: A reinstatement of the rolling Section 245(i) amnesty. In short this program that admitted 900,000 immigrants legally into the United States for the first four months of 2001. This program was supposed to be a continuation of Section 245 (i), an amnesty act passed during Clinton's administration in 1997. *Green Card through the Legal Immigration Family Equity (LIFE) Act* (Washington D.C., U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)

Ryan: I love the way you think about this.

Gina: These are two major things in my life which I did not plan, they were there, but these are definitely the big steps those that were (pause) were part of my life and made me who I am now, probably.

Ryan: That's great

Gina: (Laughs)

Ryan: It's great when you think about it.

Gina: I didn't plan it. I didn't plan it.

Ryan: I'm gonna change it up a little bit.

Give me the example of the roles of men and women. While they were living in Romania, did you feel was it ... was there an equality, was there a, uh, was there a large difference between men and women? Obviously, I would assume at the time we would favor men⁵⁴ but nothing of that sort it seemed that gender roles are pretty much-

Gina: That totally ... total respect like here⁵⁵, no ... no differences.

Ryan: Great

Um, next question, you finished that one. Okay, so while you were living in Romania, you were living under the communist regime as we've spoken about it, multiple times and we actually spoke about revolution.⁵⁶ I did a little bit of background information before I came into the interview because I realized that, um, Romania was a communist regime and I wanted to see the whole progression of what happened and how it all changed. I came upon crazy, crazy stuff. I saw, um, the (pause) the revolution's going on in the

⁵⁴ I was under the impression that which a country under such oppression would also see problems within gender equality. I was pleasantly surprised to hear what Gina had to say.

⁵⁵ When referring to "here" Gina is referencing the United States.

⁵⁶ The Romanian Revolution began December 16 and ended Christmas day 1989. During this revolution Romania's citizens as well as its military turned against President Nicolae Ceausescu and his communist party. The revolution concluded Christmas day with the execution of boy Nicolae as well as his wife Elena. *Romania's 'first Couple' Executed* (London, BBC News, December 25, 1989)

middle of the streets, in the middle of towns, it seemed like it, it seemed like there was just a ... it was the president, um, Nicola- ... what was-

Gina: Nicolae Ceausescu?

Ryan: Mm-hmm and he had, uh, who's, the secret police force, the Securitate?⁵⁷

Gina: Mm-hmm

Ryan: That's what they called it?

Gina: Mm-hmm, Securitate

Ryan: Mm-hmm, and then the (pause) who is the, national army of Romania actually revolted against them, correct?

Gina: Yeah, but I think you also say Securitate, you are looking for the world militia. Militia⁵⁸ is to be the ... the policeman so that department and the army initially was protecting him.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: But then the army did turn against him protecting the people, yeah.⁵⁹

Ryan: I know

Gina: I would be curious to know what you actually read because I never went back to, to see what's all then and what's the reality of what people think these days and who really helped us because that's ... it's internal action what happened there.

⁵⁷ Much of the reason why President Ceausescu was in power was because of his "Securitate" or secret police that had turned very corrupt by the communist regime. The securitate were responsible for many of the disappearances and murders that occurred continuously throughout the entire country. A BBC article highlighting the 20th anniversary of the revolution, Romanian reporter Oana Lungescu reviews the Romanian military compound that houses the records of the securitate. Often it is referred to as "an evil library" due to the severity and quantity of the crimes committed. Oana Lungescu, *Romanian Securitate Legacy 20 Years After Revolution* (Bucharest, BBC News Romania, December 10, 2009)

⁵⁸ Here Gina is referring to the securitate as a militia rather than a police force.

⁵⁹ Initially the Romanian military assisted the president at the beginning of the revolution but ultimately sided with its citizens. *History of Romania*

Ryan: I don't, I don't think people know and I don't think people really understand what happened. I went and I saw the YouTube video.⁶⁰ I saw the entire ... I saw the videos of the shootings and the shooting that was going on the street. I saw the videos of the mass graves that were happening on the city, outside of Bucharest. I saw the video of the ... the trial that they held for him and his wife inside that little school house and then they put them outside and then they killed them.

Gina: Mm-hmm, I guess a little nasty though, that (pause to think) happened I think right on Christmas?

Ryan: That happened on Christmas on television.

Gina: Yeah

Ryan: What was it like growing up in this ... I mean when I was 14 years old I was going to middle school, I went home, I went to football practice and even think of a thing you were having the complete total revolution of the country you lived in. Tell me about that a little bit.

Gina: I think I was pretty young to realize what was happening.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: All I know my father, my brother actually at that time he was I think just finishing the army, two years of army and my mom was very nervous about him but it happened very quick, very fast, few days ...

Ryan: It was seven ... seven days that's ... yeah

Gina: Four days, seven days, yeah, it was less than a week⁶¹ and we were definitely happy to see what's happening and he's gonna be caught and whatever. We have sensed that we ... we finally we're gonna be free or the ... a lot believed but I don't know it was a frightening moment because again you don't know

⁶⁰ I was able to find a YouTube video that pieced together different live television reports of the revolution. In this video you see warfare in the middle of what appeared to be once beautiful town squares. Citizens are watching on the street while the army and securitate exchange machinegun fire. The clip then cuts to a sentencing and execution via firing squad of President Ceausescu and his wife Elena. This video clip was aired live for Romanian citizens to view. *History Recorded LIVE: Romania's Revolution* (Bucharest, YouTube, November 25, 1989)

⁶¹ Gina was not sure as to how many days the revolution actually was. This further proves how Gina was unaffected by the chaos occurring within her homeland.

much more and how can you know what's next? You just know it's not good. You just know it's not good. That's what I can tell you the same feeling ...

Ryan: I couldn't even watch it.

Gina: ... I had when I came to United States. I didn't know how it's gonna be (pause) in United States. All I knew I'm full of, it's enough. I had enough and of what I've done there and then I just had to go and I just that's ... that's the happiness already, you just go, you're free. You're free to choose, to move on. So that, that's (pause) how did I perceive it as a ... as a citizen of Romania at that time? Just-

Ryan: Because it would-

Gina: Being insecure I think that's well at that point. I just, we're just all (pause) all happy, certainly we're all happy to seeing ending but I, nobody really ... deep in our hearts I don't think anyone was happy to see that we really killed a president on Christmas day.

Ryan: It was-

Gina: It was cruel but it's ... probably that's meant to happen. What could we have done with him but then-

Ryan: Nothing, I ... I-

Gina: Another three days in the prison, what's the point?⁶²

Ryan: I know the (pause) I was just so overwhelmed. It put it in perspective for me. They were sitting inside the ... they were sitting inside the school house. There was a Mock trial and not a Mock trial⁶³ ... there was some sort of a trial going on the school house. They ... the wife ... I don't think the president really said too much but his wife was constantly screaming and yelling and cursing saying this didn't happen, this didn't happen, and I watched this on a documentary⁶⁴ of the (pause) the trooper that was actually responsible for

⁶² Here Gina is implying that it was necessary for her former president to be executed even though it happened to have coincided with Christmas day.

⁶³ Here I accidentally said mock trial while trying to say makeshift or improvised trial. Once again their trial was captured on live television.

⁶⁴ *History Recorded LIVE: Romania's Revolution*

watching them and actually was one of the people who fired the shots at them. They brought them outside of the school building and they killed them.

Gina: We haven't, uh, understand. I want you to know that these people, the president and his wife, they're extremely, extremely limited people.⁶⁵

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: So to ... as a kid, I didn't know that in a sense but growing up you can, you just can't accept that the president of your own country, the person who is leading your life is at that level so it's just ... we're all happy to have him gone.

Ryan: Just a very ... it just seems like I-

Gina: Not that ... not that they can kill a bird but (laughs)

Ryan: It just seems like a very, very interesting town to live in.

Gina: It happened. It happened and I'm glad it happened but unfortunately it's not better now that's the sad part. Whatever he did, he, he would ask or the way how he (pause) he control us, he did protect his country. So the forest, the rivers, the nature, (pause) factories, institutions they were built under his time. Since then, people just destroy everything.⁶⁶

Ryan: Really?

Gina: So how sad is that?

Ryan: If-

Gina: A lot of people actually these days they do miss Ceausescu.

Ryan: It's an interesting thing to think about. What, can you tell me about the ... the government and the, (pause) obviously this democracy of Romania now, but you, can you explain to me a little bit more of the government style or the format, how you would go to elect officials stuff like that today?

⁶⁵ By "limited" Gina means corrupt of feared people as appose to the United States President and First Lady who are meant to be the model family and set an example for its citizens.

⁶⁶ Once again Gina is bringing up the benefits of President Ceausescu even going as far to say he protected the country. From this I have perceived that the rule and oppression they were under existed but Ceausescu still meant to preserve and run a successful country instead of working for personal gain.

Gina: These days, I really, I'm not part of it at all. Once I'd left, it's gone, subject close. Uh, I think they have different they have different parties, um. How they get elected, they get together then at least I know from my mom's talks at least five different parties⁶⁷ there and then constantly argue in five and unfortunately the sad part is that they never get to the point of country where they ... they have the quality people to choose from.

So we went through actually only two presidents since then from what I remember, but, if I go home like for example right now, the president who is just ending his eighth year in the end of it,⁶⁸ my mom is okay, pro him against the others, but if I'm going to Oradea and, have a talk to my friends from college, they hate this current system. But I think they hated because they hope for better, not necessary that they like the other parts. I have no clue. I ... I don't know.

And I don't know I never ... I never voted, I'm sorry, I never voted, I have the right to vote from here for my own country, never got into it cause I'm sick and tired of everything and once I did the best I could and they did not offer me what I thought I deserve in my own country and I had to leave then I have no respect for that system, unfortunately. I love my country and I won't go back to live there. I love my land and my culture and my family, but the system I could never accept.

I feel bad for my friends who live there, who unfortunately they are just more and more and more frustrated. And I have friends who left Romania and yet went back. I guess emotionally they just can't cope with living in their own land. They went back but it's very hard. They compromise a lot to live there and yet lately actually for the past year, I, uh, had met a lot of wonderful, my age even younger, wonderful, educated kids, six different doctors from six different parts of Romania.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: Like how cruel is that to be in medical school there and leave your own country fortunately, yet do great here to work in great hospitals in the city.

Ryan: Uh, it (pause) because it doesn't make sense to me.

⁶⁷ Currently in Romania there are 9 political parties who hold seats in their parliament. The majority leader party is the Social Democratic Party whose ideology is social democracy. This party is currently being lead by Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta. *Romania* (Cia World Factbook)

⁶⁸ When Gina says, "at the end of it" she is referring to once the President finished his term.

Gina: So why ... why they have to do that? Why they have to do that? And why can't-

Ryan: I mean I'm-

Gina: Right, in your own country? I ... I love United States but how can ... what reason is that, that's ... that's not a value who you are and you're better for someone else. How ... how can you as an institution, as a country allow that to happen with your own people? That's it.⁶⁹

Ryan: Is that, um, you think that's Romania specifically or the area of your, uh, Romanianism?

Gina: Oh, you mean history Europe ... um, Eastern Europe had changed a lot actually because like I said before, Hungary for example was much, much better economically when we had the revolution, when we switched to democracy. Uh, these days Romania is doing better (laughs) I don't know how much better you cannot make it today. I think Romania is at the bottom of its own life, but, uh, I just don't ... I don't know about things in other countries ... in Eastern Europe.

Ryan: Okay, I'm gonna switch you over a little bit towards, uh, we finally meet it here. Tell me about the ... I'm sorry we haven't meet it here yet. Tell me about the application process you had to, uh, go through in order to, um, go to this country.

Gina: Uh, for immigration or to come here?

Ryan: Well, for immigr (pause) well to come here then you came here initially via a working visa, correct?

Gina: Mm-hmm

Ryan: And then you applied for green card while you work here.

Gina: Through the amnesty, yeah

Ryan: Mm-hmm and so just explain to me a little bit of that process.

⁶⁹ Gina is showing her frustration for the immense talent that is being produced in Romania that is leaving to join an easier beneficial workforce in another country.

Gina: At that time was pretty, pretty hard to leave Romania. I don't know if, from this country's respect, did they have the same open doors like now for Romanians or not, I have no clue, but as a Romanian at that time I remember being extremely hard. I remember like from little town Beius it was just three of us that we've left, we went from Romania and never came back. But these days students come travel, go back, come for three months, go back.⁷⁰ We couldn't do that as a tourist at that time.

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: Tourist visa, you couldn't get that. So I remember being already I graduated and I did have I think I have attended another year of kind of advanced study after college so I still was active as a student. I was also teaching and I had this opportunity to come to ... to work in United States for three months plus a month of being a tourist so I got a visa for four months I think and I came in, uh, just for that short period of time.⁷¹ But then I had a little courage to stay a little more and, uh, (laughs) I'm lucky enough I was here. I met you in between and then, I, uh, was lucky enough to be here like I said in 2001 when Clinton gave that amnesty. I was never illegal though because my, nobody ever pulled my passport such a thing that get out by the day so it was a kind of partial status.⁷²

Ryan: Interesting, so what was it like, um, having that partial status and did you, uh, I mean that exceeds almost like a sort of limbo sort of thing?

Gina: I felt comfortable because I always knew I had a good will and I don't do anything bad and I don't betray anything in any system and I had a hope that things would work out and I, besides being part of your family, I also volunteered around that time. You might not remember but Saturday and Sunday I would go to PT private offices and volunteer.

Ryan: That's (pause) that was your sponsor, right?⁷³

⁷⁰ Gina is showing the opportunities not presented for Romanians that was not offered to her as a child or student. Her application process to come to this country legally back in 1999 was much more difficult than the standard student and working visas that have become popular in the mid 2000's.

⁷¹ This is when Gina worked as a nurse at Camp Towanda, the summer camp my sister and I have attended in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

⁷² Gina's amnesty was a partial status, while in the United States Gina had to apply for both a Green Card and her citizenship.

⁷³ In order to apply for citizenship one must obtain sponsors who will vouch for and provide aid for a person becoming a citizen of this country.

Gina: Yeah, yeah one at Crest⁷⁴ but also another one ... and I remember in Englewood (New Jersey), that's the one first door I knocked at, just to (pause) to expose myself to see how is physical therapy in United States. I, I felt comfortable. I jumped into studying and buying books for preparing myself to get my license⁷⁵ not even thinking of how many different steps I had to go through to get to that point but my goal was I knew exactly was beyond of the top.

Ryan: Do you feel that your, um, your great need and your great desire to complete your goals such as becoming a citizen and employing yourself kind of distracted you from the, the uncertainty you have a little bit?

Gina: Totally

Ryan: Being in this country?

Gina: Totally, I have no time for suffering at all not even missing my mom and dad, probably around Christmas time I would miss, I remember those times even leaving your house or renting the rental place. I remember on Christmas time, I would be homesick a little bit ...

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: ... but, and at that time actually, we didn't have ... I haven't had, my parents actually didn't have access to internet so at that time my parents will, my mom I remember she was writing every single day another letter and then by Friday she will mail it and I will call her every Saturday ...

Ryan: Yeah, your phone cards⁷⁶

Gina: So those are ... exactly see.

Ryan: Yup, I remember.

Gina: So you remember the phone cards, that's our communication, out of the point, I don't know the year when they got the internet and then we started to see each other every weekend.

⁷⁴ Crest Physical Therapy, located in Fort Lee NJ.

⁷⁵ The Federation Of State Boards of Physical Therapy exam

⁷⁶ Before Skype or Facebook and still even now people use phone cards, prepaid international minutes, in order to make calls to their home country.

Ryan: Yeah

Gina: And actually they started to travel over and visit me every single year. Since then, since 2000, every single year either mom or dad come over to visit for a month.

Ryan: Both of you are lucky.

Gina: Yeah (laughs)

Ryan: Okay, so now that you've been in the United States for so many years, have your (pause) would you say that your opinions about Romania have significantly changed? You can give me all different sorts of aspects. Um, obviously we know there have been great physical change. We've had a development of, an extreme change in, I'm sorry, extreme government change. Uh, it sounds like education is served some progress. What is (pause) what is your thoughts now that you've been living in this country for such a long time?

You know you expressed the desire to go back, but you still ... it still seems as if you feel, um, not differently but you have an interesting opinion in, uh, what was ... what goes on in the country now?

Gina: I don't think in Romania sadly it was nine years that I'd spent here and only after nine years I could safely, legally go back and come back to return⁷⁷, so for nine years I did not visit Romania and sadly, I was totally disappointed when I went back to see whatever interested me, it was worse than ... or probably because nine years means a lot in someone's life being exposed too much here and being a different level of life probably I ... it was hard for me to consider reality of what was there although people ... a lot of people would say, oh, yeah this is better, houses look better, streets are cleaner.

Schools, nobody said schools are better, but to me I think everything is more valid than it was when I was there and I can give you a great example on my, uh, school being so dedicated to my profession and being in touch with some of the professors I really consider. When I went back, I considered to ... I went to school I visited them. All these years I wasn't in touch via ... I didn't have a time for that to see what's going over there ... that program to see where they are, what they do these days but with my professional experience here, I was thinking that I might probably consider going every year here,

⁷⁷ Gina was not able to return to Romania until she received her citizenship. That process took Gina 9 years since she came to the country.

there for a month and share with them my experience here and continue. I used to teach in Oraeda, so I wanted to share my experience from here and be helpful not to be paid for it⁷⁸

Ryan: Mm-hmm

Gina: But just to share with them if something else that they can bring into their curriculum. And I went there to find out that actually that doesn't even exist. That's the moment that I, that I found out that that curriculum doesn't even exist, that the structure of the program was already changed and ... it's just because, not because it wasn't needed or it wasn't good, it's because of interest of people in, in different living positions. So I was sadly leaving the university almost crying deeply in my heart.

So I don't see an overall education. I don't think it's better unfortunately. Again, people some people have money, some people don't, some people struggle, some people have enough to spoil themselves, but that means you might send a kid to private daycare but then I don't think when they enter school, the general states for regular schools I don't think that's better at all compared it with the education I got in Romania 20 years ago.

Ryan: So it seems as if

Gina: I don't want to go back to raise a child that's for sure.

Ryan: It seems as if in the private sector, you're able to, um ... be able to get the relatively the highest form⁷⁹

Gina: Quality

Ryan: Highest form of college you like. It seems that you're really disappointed in the country as a whole for the amenities that it doesn't offer to the entire country ...

Gina: A lot

⁷⁸ This is Gina's idea of giving back. She conveyed to me after the interview she is planning to spend a significant time in Romania at her home in the up coming year. She hopes to return to University of Oradea to help with their medical program.

⁷⁹ Here I was confused, I was not sure if Gina was trying to say she preferred education during the time she lived in Romania or if she preferred it now. I know that she has spent significant time in Romania but would have no reason to spend time or talk about public or private education.

Ryan: Health care, it seems like it's not offered at that (pause) fairly overall for the

Gina: Health care, education, everything that has to be shared between people, citizens, it's, it's not in place and if you talk about people with money who can afford of those things probably the percentage of that population is very small, but, um, 10 ... I'm just throwing a number, 10%⁸⁰ that's-

Ryan: Do you have the desire to, um, give back in a sense? Is ... is there a way for you to give back? Could you go help and volunteer and maybe see some changes? Obviously, on a large scale, it's difficult to see but you're talking about how you wanted to go back and, um, speak, uh, go back to university and go and see if you could speak to people?

Gina: Definitely

Ryan: Could you have an opportunity to do that now if you could or something along those lines?

Gina: I think just, quickly realizing that that problem no longer exists and the quality of the (pause) the whole season had changed in a way that, I don't know, I was very disappointed, I realized that those kids, those students were not even there for what they are to become. And why would I waste my time to put my heart into that world at that time. I don't even know how they do physical therapy these days, so I was done with the professional part then I love kids.

I would go anytime there to work with kids just to devote my time to little children who have no parents⁸¹, but um, also if I'll have the time and if ... if I can make the time probably at one point in life, I wouldn't mind having a small business but not necessary to build a business space on the health system. It would just be more trouble I guess.

Ryan: You, um ... we spoke earlier actually but we were unable to get into the interview about, potentially your plan to the future and you love this country and you really enjoy spending time here but you've expressed the desire to go back. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit?

⁸⁰ Gina here is inferring that only the elite 10% were able to afford private education while she was in school.

⁸¹ Gina is now a licensed practicing physical therapist who specializes in pediatrics. She not specializes in house calls where she can receive Medicaid as a form of insurance. Often she exceeds that which she is required to do as a way of giving back to children.

Gina: Yup, of course I love to go back because it's like I said before, your roots and what you grow up with, always stays there. Being here, again I just can't picture especially because my parents are alive and I have my all ... I have absolutely no family here so the whole family being there, in my head right now I picture that this is gonna be forever. I just can't see that my mom and dad will at one point will not be there.⁸² And also the aspect that I do have a house or two houses, I have properties, I have land, I have a lot that my parents worked for and left or will leave me and my brother.

It's something that's there and it's even, not even the value of it, but it's the emotional value. It's from my parents. It's from my grandparents, there I grew up and as my childhood.

Ryan: You seem emotional⁸³

Gina: Exactly, so that emotionally to me is so important and so valuable than anything else on earth but as, um, adolescent, who is ready for life and has already profession that loves and wants to pursue, that was the time when I had to leave so I go crazy, I do the best I can in my life in every single aspect. Now, wherever I think I belong, which is here, but I definitely keep open both doors for the future.

Ryan: You'd be, um-

Gina: I'm going to be sick in Romania. I don't want to depend on the health system there and that concerns me. Um, I definitely (pause) my style of life is more connected to United States than to Romania but as I love nature and simplicity, I can find myself living a peaceful old age there (laughs) if I'm healthy.

Ryan: That's great.

Gina, this was absolutely wonderful. It was so incredibly nice to be able to do this with someone who I grew up, with someone who ... who raised me for not ... not a very long time even though it almost feels like it was forever. Um,

⁸² I have personally met Gina's parents, Maximilian and Aurelia both and they are lovely people. The only problem is they speak very little English which would propose a trouble for older people immigrating to the United States. Additionally they are completely immersed within their culture which is fantastic to hear stories or if my family or I can ever visit, but this curbs their desire to live in the United States with their daughter.

⁸³ Here Gina appeared to be a bit water eyed. Gina and I always joked that we never cried so we laughed about that. Clearly her reflections during the interview were very emotional to her.

and this was actually really, really special for me that I was able to lean on ...
learn about your background and learn about your entire story about
someone who called my sister everything. I just wanna say thank you, I love
you, you're the best ...

Gina: You're welcome, I love you too. Am I all right?