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## Oral history interview with Wilson Guzmán González, March 13, 2022

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## ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

### Oral History Interview with Wilson Guzmán González, March 13, 2022

#### PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Wilson Guzmán González conducted by Andrea N. Guzmán Martínez on March 13, 2022. This interview is part of coursework done by students at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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#### Translation #1

Interviewer: Andrea N. Guzmán Martínez

Interviewee: Wilson Guzmán González

Date: March 13, 2022.

Location: Wilson's House, Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico

Andrea [00:00:02]

Hello, my name is Andrea Guzmán Martínez and today Sunday March 13 2022 I am going to be interviewing my dad Wilson in the living room of our house at Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Before beginning I want to remind you that the purpose of this interview is that we are going to share your story as a part of a project for the creative writing course, oral history, of the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, and the theme of this interview is the healthcare during the Covid-19. After we finish this interview I will be giving you or I will be discussing with you a permission slip and there you will be able to choose where your story will be shared. Before beginning, it is important that you know that this is your story and during the whole process of of transcription, of editing, the final work, I will be giving you updates and you will be able to decide at any time whether you want to change or eliminate what you believe pertinent. Eh if you're ready, if you have any question you can tell me.

Wilson [00:01:09]

So, there are details that I don't have to say right, honestly.

Andrea [00:01:13]

Yes, yes, if you do not want to share any detail, you tell me: "look I don't want to talk about this" and I eh we will continue with the next question, with that there is no problem.

Wilson [00:01:21]

It's very well.

Andrea [00:01:22]

Okay. I will check if we are recording. Eh, first could you tell us your full name, your age and where you are from.

Wilson [00:01:32]

My name is Wilson Guzmán González, I am 48 years old and I am from Mayagüez.

Andrea [00:01:37]

Okay. Eh, where were you born?

Wilson [00:01:41]

I was born in Manhattan, in the hospital, eh, [Monsaimen?] hospital and I lived for three years in New York.

Andrea [00:01:51]

Okay.

Wilson [00:01:52]

In the Bronx.

Andrea [00:01:53]

In the Bronx. Do you have any memories of living there during those three years in New York?

Wilson [00:01:59]

Eh, yes I remember that next to us there was a lady named Doña Leja and we would go play with her grandchildren on the fire escapes. And in that place there were always a lot of fires and it scared us because the siren was playing all night. And I remember a lot of the Bronx Zoo because they had a monkey that smoked cigars and I always can't forget the monkey that they had smoking cigar.

Andrea [00:02:28]

Okay. So after those three years of living in New York, eh, what, what did you do? did you move?

Wilson [00:02:35]

Yes, it's just that, eh, the plans were to stay in New York but there was a situation at school with my brother where a young boy snapped a pencil at him. And at that time, eh, things were hot in New York because it was in 77-78 and there were a lot of fights between hispanics and, and there was a lot of racism. And so my dad decided to, eh, leave everything he had

achieved in New York to come to live in Puerto Rico, in the town of Mayaguez.

Andrea [00:03:06]

And once you arrived here in Puerto Rico to the town of Mayaguez, where did you stay?

Wilson [00:03:10]

Well, we went to live at the house that, that was inherited from my mom. It was an old wooden house and that's where, while my dad was able to get a job, eh, that it took him a while, so..., to then be able to make a house right next to it, made of concrete.

Andrea [00:03:27]

Okay. Do you have any memory in the wooden house that, that you lived [inaudible] while they were building the cement house?

Wilson [00:03:35]

Yes, I had many memories. One of the biggest memories was that there were rats and they wouldn't let me sleep. And the house was very old and every time there came an Onda, a wave of rain, the house moved from side to side. And that it didn't have a bathroom and the bathroom was downstairs and I had to shower with cold water. I will never forget that...

Andrea [00:03:52]

Okay. Uhm. Can you tell me what your first job was?

Wilson [00:04:01]

Eh, yes, I had, when I was young I did many things. I washed cars, washed windows for people. But work, work as such, was in the maintenance of green areas, planting grass, cleaning the patio, making gardens. That's what I was for a while, uh, working.

Andrea [00:04:19]

And did you like that job? Or was it more like that was what there was?

Wilson [00:04:23]

No, at that time, well, eh, it was the job that was there but I liked it. I really liked planting plants and making gardens. Eh, I still think at some point I want to make a business out of it because I like it.

Andrea [00:04:35]

Okay. What do you do currently?

Wilson [00:04:39]

Eh. I am currently a dental assistant, I have been for 21 years, eh, working in oral health.

Andrea [00:04:46]

And what made you want to study dental assisting?

Wilson [00:04:51]

The truth is that it was by chance because I had originally studied business administration. And then I worked with my cousin who had a landscaping business and so after many years, well, eh, because of the bad administration that he had, eh, I lost my job. And a scholarship to study dental assistant appeared and so I decided to study dental assistant, but it really was by chance.

Andrea [00:05:13]

And do you think it was a good decision? Do you like what you are doing now?

Wilson [00:05:17]

I like it, I like it a lot, I like it a lot. Eh, I have been doing it for 22 years so I'm supposed to like it, right, eh, but I can't, I can't deny that I am a little bit tired because of the many hours I work.

Andrea [00:05:31]

Okay and do you have any medical condition?

Wilson [00:05:34]

Yes, I have, eh, two main medical conditions which is diabetes and high blood pressure.

Andrea [00:05:42]

And do you think that these conditions have, medical conditions sorry, have affected or, or, the long working hours that you mention from work along these conditions, do you think that that could also be related to how you feel.

Wilson [00:05:57]

Well, honestly, eh, these medical conditions arise many times by inheritance, my mom and dad had them, but yes, working so much, you don't have a fixed time for lunch or dinner, sometimes you have lunch at 11, sometimes at 1. Just like if you leave work at 6 in the afternoon, well, you eat dinner late. And all those things, well, they do exacerbate diabetes and high blood pressure.

Andrea [00:06:19]

Okay. Now I am going to then ask you questions about grandpa, who is your dad, Jaime Guzmán. Eh, first can you tell us where grandpa was born.

Wilson [00:06:31]

Yes, Jaime Victor Guzmán Alvarado was born in 1945 in the town of Lajas, Puerto Rico.

Andrea [00:06:41]

Okay and where did your dad grow up? Did he grow up right there in Lajas?

Wilson [00:06:46]

Yes, he, he grew up and was raised in the sector [inaudible] Cristian, in a neighborhood of the town of Lajas, eh, where he was there, eh, he studied his first, right, his first years. He didn't study a lot, only up to first, second grade. After that, his parents put him to work in the field and he cutted cane, dealt with cows, and honestly he got tired. And at 18 he went to live in San Juan for a year at his aunt's house and after that, well, he moved to New York where he worked for several years, and, well, until we returned to Puerto Rico.

Andrea [00:07:20]

Okay, ehm, and why did grandpa leave school?

Wilson [00:07:26]

Well, at that time, eh, as in today's time they did bullying. There was an individual who bullied my aunt, well, and my dad got tired one day and threw a stone at him and cracked the boy's head. At that time the parents, well, when you did something your parents hit you or punished you and my grandparents got angry and took him out of school and told time: "Ah, since you don't behave, then now you're going to go to work at the field". And so, they took him out of school and put him to work in the field.

Andrea [00:07:56]

Okay, and do you know why he decided to move from San Juan to New York?

Wilson [00:08:03]

Yes, since he did not have much education, well, in San Juan at that time it was very difficult to get a job, he was not a professional. So his aunt told him if he wanted to go with another aunt that he had, if he wanted to go with her to the United States. And she paid for his ticket and he decided to go to, to the United States.

Andrea [00:08:20]

Okay, ehm, there in the United States when he came to New York, how did he make a living? I mean, what jobs did he have?

Wilson [00:08:28]

Okay, he had many jobs but the first job he had was as a cook, because he liked to cook, at a girls college of, of girls. He spent several years working there and he also worked in a shoe factory. And so, he had several jobs in the time he was in New York.

Andrea [00:08:46]

Okay, uhm, lets see, so when he left school he didn't know, did he get to learn to read and write?

Wilson [00:09:00]

He knew very little, as he said, about letters. He did not know how to read or write much, but he knew a lot about numbers, in numbers nobody took him for a fool. But in reality he always felt proud because he said that he did not, did not have to study to achieve his things in his life. But still he motivated me and my brother to study, but honestly no, he never had the interest to study because he achieved his things without having to study at that time.

Andrea [00:09:27]

Uhm, let's see here. Is there a story that grandpa always shared with you that he remembered from New York?

Wilson [00:09:42]

Eh, there were several, several, uh, stories but the majority of them were, well, violent because at that time there was a lot of racism and there was a lot of war between Latinos and Blacks. And so, and in order to survive, he had to, well, to defend himself many times, he had to defend himself many times, and sometimes even at his own jobs because he had a lot of conflict. Eh, basically what he talked about in New York well it was, it was quite violent and situations that, that he had to defend himself to be able to survive at that time in the 60s and 70s in New York.

Andrea [00:10:22]

Okay. Now I am going to ask you questions a little bit more specific about, about grandpas condition, if, if you agree

Wilson [00:10:32]

Yes, I agree.

Andrea [00:10:35]

Okay. Jaime had cardiovascular dementia. Can you tell how you found out about his diagnosis?

Wilson [00:10:44]

Okay. My dad had a lot of medical conditions, he had diabetes and high blood pressure. So, eh, at one point, he had chest pain and when he was taken to the clinic, where they did a catheterization, they detected that he had 4 clogged heart valves. And so, they proceeded to transfer him, eh, from Mayaguez to San Juan to do another catheterization. And after confirming that he had four clogged veins, they decided to do an open heart surgery. And it was a bit of a complicated situation because they had to remove a vein from one leg to be able to fabricate new veins. But then after that situation, several years later, he began to lose his mind and so, but when we realized it in reality was because he got lost once, he left for one town and we found him in another. And so we then understood that something had happened, something strange happened in him, right. And so we decided to look for a specialist, that at that time we did not know who the doctor was, right. But studying who was the professional

who had, had to see him we found a really good neurologist in Mayagüez and he did several studies, several questions. They did an encephalogram, needle test, a bunch of tests. But the, the, the study that really hit, right, the, his situation was a few specific questions. They ask him 30 questions and what they do is that the first questions are repeated again at the end and that's when they realized that he was not having retention. And so that's how the doctor then decides to medicate him for the condition that is treated the same as an Alzheimer's patient. Simply that the condition of cardiovascular dementia is that not enough oxygen reaches the brain and you begin to lose your memory as if you had Alzheimer's.

Andrea [00:12:43]

Okay. So when you found out about the, the diagnosis, right, vascular dementia, at least I had never heard of that condition until, until we found out what happened with grandpa, did you know how the condition worked right away or was it like something you learned during all the process.

Wilson [00:13:04]

No, honestly, the little knowledge I had was about Alzheimer's and as I said that it was hereditary, well, we never thought that we would go through a similar situation because you lose your memory in the same way and sometimes even more aggressively than with Alzheimer's. So the doctor, well, was very responsible and put us a video and told us to look for a lot of information. Eh, it was a difficult situation because we had lost my mother due to kidney problems and he was alone, so we said: "what are we going to do now?" But then, looking for information, well, we learned that this is a disease that they are not the ones who suffer from it, who suffer from it are the relatives and one, well, must have peace and, and, and, and, and a lot of patience because they are people who get aggressive and sometimes say bad words unintentionally, right, they do not want to talk, talk that way. And one suffers from it because he is one's father, right, but, well, it was a lot of education, reading a lot, looking for a lot of videos. And thanks to the doctor, he was the one who educated us because I didn't know that this condition existed either.

Andrea [00:14:12]

Okay. Eh, going back a little bit when you were, when you were talking about grandpa having an open-heart surgery. I remember that, that you told us that after they operated him, like a couple of days later, I don't remember the details well, he was already sitting down, and how was that process?

Wilson [00:14:33]

Eh. It was a very, eh, at the beginning a very hard situation because you arrived, he was operated on Friday and then you enter to, to intensive, right, in the area where a person who is operated from the heart is, and there everyone is intubated and with 20 tubes, 20 pipes, and what was impressive was that the next day when I went to visit him he was already sitting down making jokes as if nothing had happened. He was a very strong man. Uh, I understand that if it hadn't been for him, for the condition of the, the, eh, losing his memory, right, uh, I



understand that maybe he could still be alive. But that situation was a bit delicate but he was a very strong man and the next day they had him walking and a week later he was already at home as if nothing had happened. And so, for it being an open heart surgery of four valves that they put in, four veins, well, eh, assimilated the surgery well. Apart from the fact that it was a tremendous doctor who operated on him in Pavia, in San Juan.

Andrea [00:15:36]

Okay. Ehm, can you tell me a story about the first year or the first months of grandpa's condition.

Wilson [00:15:48]

Well, at the beginning, by chance, your godmother calls me and says: "Hey Wilson, is your dad alright?" And I told her: "Well, yes" because he was okay, he was normal. "But it's that he hit my car and ran away" and I was like: "But how is it that, how did dad hit your car and run away?" and she told me: "Yes, your dad hit my car and ran away". And we said but how strange because, uh, honestly he, eh, even though the condition had, eh, been diagnosed, he was medicated and, and he looked good. He did his things, he went to the bank, he bought groceries, he did everything. And then, eh, uh, there were several other, eh, situations too like for example, eh, he cooked a lot, eh, he made a lot of fried egg and put it, and put like, and put like 4 plates at the table, at the table with food for 4 people as if there were many people there. Uh, there were, there were many situations at the beginning of the condition. It is a very sad condition and in reality the family is who is more affected because for him all of that was a joke.

Andrea [00:17:00]

Okay. Uhm, so at that moment, right, when you started seeing all those situations, uh, what did you decide to do? Did you decide to have a caregiver with him?

Wilson [00:17:13]

Uh, the situation, eh, was a little complicated, eh, the situation was a bit complicated because in reality we couldn't afford to pay for a caregiver. Eh, the caregivers charged \$100 a night and my dad didn't take much from social security so, nothing, well, my wife Ginette Martínez Soto was the one who took care of him during the day. Eh, my brother helped us from time to time at the beginning but later it was difficult because he also has a lot of medical conditions. And so, in reality, who ended up taking care of him was me and my wife for 5 years until he passed away.

Andrea [00:17:52]

Okay. Ehm, now I am going to start talking or asking you questions about the, the Hurricane María, then with the earthquakes and the pandemic. Ehm, do you agree?

Wilson [00:18:08]

Yes, I agree.

Andrea [00:18:09]

Okay. Eh, can you tell me how was the preparation you had here in your house for Hurricane María?

Wilson [00:18:18]

Yes, originally, uh, we had passed through George 20 years ago and we did not expect that this storm was going to be so strong but something, like I felt the fear that, that something strong was coming and we decided, well, to take a lot of water, buy candles, prepare ourselves with food, eh, as everyone regularly does. But what we had never done was put protections on the windows, we put wood on the windows, on the doors and because one had like that, that presentiment that, that something big was going to happen. And the reality was that yes, it was something big because after that, uh, we spent more than 3 months without electricity, without water. It was a difficult situation but we prepared ourselves, thanks to God, in time and we were able to, eh, survive, as one says, for two or three months, while everything was being normalized. Uh, one was affected emotionally because it was 18 hours in one's house, 18 hours, and everything, all the children, even our kitten, was very nervous because it was like something that did not want to end. That wind, that rain was tough, it was tough, it was a very tough storm. And we did not get a category 5 because when it arrived here it was already more or less between 3 or 4 but those who received it strongly in the Humacao area and such, it was very tough for them and in general for all of Puerto Rico because a lot of people died.

Andrea [00:19:45]

And that was the preparation you had here and how was with grandpa in that case?

Wilson [00:19:52]

Okay. In that case, well, the preparations were, eh, more or less the same, but the blessing that we had was that my aunt, since she lived in a house with a zinc roof, decided to go to my dad's house and she stayed with my cousins and the mother of my cousins at the house. And so, eh, well, when I was able to go down to Mayagüez, well, everything was alright. He was alright and I had taken care of leaving him water, food and, and, many things. But thanks to God, since he was starting the [inaudible] about cardiovascular dementia, well, he was fine, you know, he did his things, he showered, he ate, it didn't seem like he had that condition because he forgot things, but it was sometimes.

Andrea [00:20:32]

Okay. Eh, so after it was, right, that was the preparation that you had here at the house and the preparation you had at grandpa's house, after the hurricane ended that there was no more rain and everything was calmer, how was that trip from Cabo Rojo to Mayaguez, which is where grandpa lived?

Wilson [00:20:50]

Well, honestly, I was not able to go down the first three days, but when I managed to go down, the roads were pretty clean, uh, but you could see the plains of Lajas and Cabo Rojo

that was, the water had not gone down, it was very high, very flooded. And so, nothing, when I got to my dad's house all his banana plants and plantains had been swept away by the storm. Eh, thanks to God his chickens were not swept away by the storm, I don't know where they hid. Eh, but there was no electricity and there was no water, but thanks to God, well, I had everything, everything prepared there so that he, eh, could survive for a few days in what one eh, with the hope that the government would solve all of this soon but, well, it didn't happen that way because too much time passed before we could have water and electricity.

Andrea [00:21:35]

Okay. Eh, a question that is not so much related but I know grandpa really loved animals and his chickens. Was he always a person who had animals like this in his house?

Wilson [00:21:47]

My dad ever since I was little that we came from the United States, eh, we got to have chickens of all kinds, we got to have turkeys, we had turkeys, we had ducks, we had, eh, pheasants and what he loved, what he loved the most were sheep and goats. There were always goats in my house, sheep, he loved goat's milk. Uh, but what he loved the most were fighting roosters, because he had fighting roosters, at the beginning we went to the cockpits to take fighting roosters. And he always had a lot, a lot of animals and eh, and he already passed away but his chickens are still there at his house, cleaning and eating in the yard of the house that was his.

Andrea [00:22:30]

And so now, so we continue talking about Hurricane María, eh, you had mentioned that in the preparation for Hurricane María, eh, you stored a lot of water, a lot of food, was there a moment where you had to resort to going to supermarkets or external aid?

Wilson [00:22:56]

Yes, like everything, no matter how much you store things there is always need for other things, uh, eh, we went to the supermarket and it was complicated. Sometimes you spent hours and hours in line and the saddest thing is that sometimes you went in and, and you couldn't get the things because the things weren't coming but thanks to God we never went hungry, eh, thirsty, needy but yes it was complicated going to the bakery, it was difficult to fill gasoline. The lines were kilometers long, sometimes you were 2 hours for \$10 of gasoline because they didn't give you, they controlled the gasoline thing. And so for this area, well, things got complicated because then they wanted to stop the trucks that came from the San Juan area to here, right, they didn't let them pass. Eh, it was like all of Puerto Rico was a little out of control in that sense. But thanks to God well the Lord helped us and, and we didn't need food and that. So regarding water and electricity, well, uh, we used to go to certain places where they had aqueduct authority trucks and we filled tanks and bottles of water, we didn't lack water either and regarding electricity, well, we had a good neighbor that we helped with gasoline and he connected us a cable to the refrigerator and with that we had a light bulb, we turned on some fans and we were able to survive the time we were without, without electricity and water, thanks to God.

Andrea [00:24:22]

Okay and that was here at our house and at, at grandpa's house, how did you, did you bring him water, bring him food?

Wilson [00:24:30]

Yes, uh, in grandpa's case, well, it was complicated because I was the one who did everything alone, that is, I had to look for water for myself and for my father and I had to go down, well, to Mayagüez every day to bring him water, eh, to bring him groceries, bring him food. Regularly, well, I cooked everything for him or we cooked everything here and we brought him food there, but thanks to God, my aunt also always gave him food when I couldn't go. Uh, and in reality, well, he survived too the, uh, in that sense he didn't, he didn't suffer a lot because in his time he was used to living without water and without electricity. It didn't really affect him much, and he was like he said: "ah, I'm not afraid of anything, I'm used to this". Uh, but in reality it was complicated in general more for the children also, right, for Andrea and Diego, uh, without class, everything was delayed and they were used to having everything easy, but thanks to God, in the end they also shared, eh, more with the neighbors, they spent more time playing outside and, and nothing, thanks to God, we survived to María.

Andrea [00:25:36]

Okay that was everything of, all the questions I had prepared for the Hurricane María event. Eh, after the, the, the Hurricane María, it was a process of, of getting used to what life was like before and then here in Puerto Rico we began to have earthquakes in 2020. How was the experience of earthquakes for you?

Wilson [00:26:04]

Well I don't even know how to explain it because no one can really explain what is the, what the earthquake is. We didn't think, in Puerto Rico in 1918 there was an earthquake and we didn't think that 100 years later, around its birthdays, there would be an earthquake in general. But like we live in Llanos Tuna, which is a neighborhood of Cabo Rojo that adjoins 5 or 6 minutes from Lajas, we felt it very strongly. It was terrifying, uh, one thinking about the family, about the children, about my father that was alone in Mayaguez, right. But in reality in Mayaguez, well, even though they felt it a lot, well, there was no damage, there was no problem. But it is something very difficult, eh, praying to God for it not to happen again. Uh, we didn't have electricity for some time, the lines returned, the lines for food. At least in this area because there was no electricity, uh, we were without water for some time and it was difficult to even sleep because one thought that, that this was going to continue, it was going to continue. We spent a long time with, with the earthquakes, uh, but how does one prepare for an earthquake? People say to prepare yourself but it is difficult to prepare and the most difficult thing was that it is terrifying, it is something that one would like nobody to experience.

Andrea [00:27:18]

And was there any structural damage to this house? at grandpa's house?

Wilson [00:27:23]

No, at least in Mayaguez as it was not felt, it was not so strong, no. In Cabo Rojo, thanks to God, at least where we live in this urbanization, uh, eh, thanks to God they were well built, right, because they are houses that are funded by federal funds, and since the federals require certain main specifications in the house, well, I understand that in this urbanization nothing happened. Sadly, the hardest thing was for the towns of Guánica, uh, where it was, eh, Yauco, Peñuelas, everything there, well it was, there was a lot of disaster in that sense. But no, not even a crack thanks to God.

Andrea [00:27:57]

And you mentioned that the power had gone out and the long lines started again, did all that remind you of what happened a couple of years before with Hurricane María?

Wilson [00:28:08]

Yes, it was very similar, it was very similar about the lines and even about the fear, although it was a different sensation, but one for the storm also felt fear. But typically Puerto Rico had not gone through so many disasters so quickly and it was relatively two or three years of, two, three years of Hurricane María that the earthquake hit us. And so, eh, of the storm were approximately 20 years and of the earthquake there were exactly 100 years after the earthquake occurred in this area because by chance it was in the western area and south that the earthquake of 1918 affected the most because it was in the Aguadilla area where a tsunami even reached Mayagüez, but thanks to God there was no tsunami, nor was there any of those situations but, but it is a difficult situation.

Andrea [00:28:59]

And just a few months after the earthquakes, right, here in Puerto Rico, the pandemic arrives, Covid-19.

Wilson [29:00:07]

That it arrived in March, the earthquakes were in January and the, and the Covid in reality when they close, when they close Puerto Rico was in March because in reality Covid was already in Puerto in February and in the United States it was already since January but no one thought, people thought that it was an HN1 or, um, dengue or swine fever, which were things that didn't last that long but still two years later, um, more than 3000 people have died in Puerto Rico and a lot of people have died worldwide and Covid is not over yet. But that was really difficult, being locked up in your house that you can't go out, lines again in the supermarkets like in the earthquakes and like in the hurricane, kilometeric lines and even though we had our electricity, our water, it was sometimes difficult to get things in the, in the supermarkets because then the Covid affected affected the United States, the docks and things were not arriving. And so one without work, without pay. It was a difficult economic situation for all Puerto Ricans, as I understand, until, well, thanks to God after that there came funds

and aids for Puerto Rico, which many people benefited from and still benefit from. But it was a difficult situation, everyone developed a phobia of Covid and sadly I spent 2 years fighting, protecting myself in my work that I was not going to get Covid and it hit me really hard that me and my wife worried, eh, I thought that we were going to end up in the hospital but well God protected us but it was difficult, its difficult. It's not a game, Covid is real.

Andrea [00:30:38]

And during, right, when the, the Covid arrived here in March, a little after that everything was closed, in that case, how did you take care of, of grandpa?

Wilson [00:30:50]

Well in that case, since I was out of work for two months, it was easier because then your mom got vacations, since she was the one that was always with him, and in those two months that I didn't work, well, I dedicated myself day and night as one says to, to taking care of him, taking him to his medical appointments, to make his food, to everything. I was always with him at that time, in that way, it affected me financially on one hand but on the other hand I was able to spend some time with him because in reality a little later, he did not last so long after that that he died.

Andrea [00:31:21]

And I remember that at the beginning when everything was closed, the governor said that, that we could not leave the houses and that, right, [inaudible] that we could not use the cars and that, how then could you get to Mayagüez?

Wilson [00:31:37]

Okay. Eh, at the beginning supposedly each town, when things started to get worse, each town had its police and closed the towns and I the firsts, the first month I did not have any problem, there was only one situation where, eh, I was able to get to Mayaguez but when I came back they stopped me and the policeman told me, you know, he explained it to me and I, well, talked to him. The police officer was very honest with me, he was very good because he told me that he had a sick mother and that he understood that if I didn't have a place to have my, my father, well, that there was no problem with me going out. What is true is that, well, eh, I couldn't stay very late at night with him because I couldn't go out, because the police were around but thanks to God I didn't have any situation.

Andrea [00:31:20]

So after the, that, right, during the pandemic, that we are still in the pandmeic, grandpa got, got sick and had to go to the hospital, when you arrived at the, the hospital, what was the protocol in relation to the pandmeic?

Wilson [00:32:37]

Look honestly like how they did it at my job, uh, temperature, eh, the person who came in couldnt leave, they had to stay there, as one says, locked up for as long as, as long as the sick

person was, right. That was what was a little more difficult because then it was difficult for me to get out of the hospital the first few days then, well, they were a little more flexible. But the protocol was good, the protocol was good, they tested him for Covid, they didn't test me, right, but, but, uh, we had to be with the masks and with all the equipment that they recommended for the Covid.

Andrea [00:33:10]

And during that, right, when he was in the hospital, I remember that, that you told me that on many occasions you had to help the nurses, ehm, could you tell me a little more about that?

Wilson [00:33:25]

Yes, what happens is that he began to get aggressive, he was a very strong man, he became aggressive so the girls to, it was very difficult to bathe him. At one point he ripped off the PET, which is the tube they put in the stomach to feed him, because he wasn't eating either. And so in general he arrives at the hospital because he had a stroke but neither the cardiovascular dementia nor the stroke took away the flexibility of his legs and hands. He was a very strong man, uh, but yes, I had to help the girls because they couldn't handle him alone because he was a very strong 6 foot, 220 pound man. And then when he got aggressive salty, eh, one thinks that, that no but I had to sign for him to be tied up because otherwise he would throw himself over the bed.

Andrea [00:34:15]

Okay. So when he was, right, they took him to the hospital and all that, that protocol that was in place for the pandemic and you also mentioned that you had to help, right, on several occasions the, the nurses too, after that, was he in the emergency room for a long time? How was the whole process in the hospital?

Wilson [00:34:37]

Okay. He was in the emergency room for approximately 3 days, then they moved him up to a room and then after that spent 21 days in the cardiovascular area. And then they did several studies, they did some MRI's, some electrocardiograms. At first, well, since they did not detect like anything because the main reason why he comes to the hospital is because he was having seizures and he had never had seizures and they were treating him the first, the first two days they are treating him as seizures but in the end, well, it was a stroke that had gotten him, uh, and so we spent approximately 21 days there. Uh, sadly, well, the nurses did what they could because they had the majority of the nurses in the area of, of the Covid and there was not much staff but I understand that, well, with what they could they treating him well, uh, nothing, after that he left there for a home and he was only, he only lasted four days in the home, the fourth day they call me that he had passed away. I understood that he had come out of the hospital well, right, that he was better but, well, for some reason God decided to take him away. So thinking of him I also remember a man who was [inaudible] in a bed beside him because no one visited him and I couldn't believe that a person alone in a hospital with no one visiting must be very complicated, uh, apparently he had no relatives and I think he had been in the hospital for about 3 months and they couldn't find what to do with him.

Andrea [00:36:07]

Ehm, you mentioned that he was, right, since he entered the hospital, he spent 21 days in the hospital, during that time, were you the only one who was there with him?

Wilson [00:36:19]

Yes, the first few days, well, when they told me that I had to stay 24 hours, well, I had to stay with him but I couldn't take it anymore. Uh, and so I had to talk to the doctor, right, with the doctor, the internist and I told her: "Look doctor, uh, I'm not even working, uh, I don't get paid if I don't work, uh, I have to go rest, I have to shower, I cannot shower here." And so she told me: "No if you are the only one, well, if you don't have a person who stays with him, it is our responsibility to provide nurses, the nurses have to be watching over him, they won't be there all the time sitting with him, but, but they will be watching him." And so, well, it became a little more flexible, so I stayed all the time during the day and at night, well, I came and rested, but, well, it was me alone for 21 days at the hospital. Eh, it was hard because of the cold, eh, I worked and didn't get paid, you know, that everything got complicated but, but nothing, uh, what, what I thought was going to happen is that he was going to come out fine but honestly, well, after that, well, he passed away.

Andrea [00:37:15]

And there at the hospital, right, you mentioned that it was noticeable, I mean, that there was little staff, do you think that was directly related to, to the pandemic?

Wilson [00:37:27]

Yes, yes, I understand that in Puerto Rico there has always been a shortage of nurses but obviously, uh, you saw it in the news and you saw it everywhere. First there were no nurses and second there were nurses who did not want to go work because they were afraid of Covid. And although the Medical Center of Mayagüez and the western area was not something as big, as serious, as in the metro area, right, other towns, but it was seen because the problems is that the Medical Center of Mayagüez is one of the largest hospitals in the western area and receives many people with heart problems and the cardiovascular area was full and all the areas were full, plus they had an area specific for Covid, so it was difficult because there weren't many staff and those nurses had to double shift but even so, they were always happy, they always treated my dad well, they made him laugh and, and what else can I say, eh, it was complicated because there weren't much male and female nurses.

Andrea [00:38:20]

Apart from the, the, right, the shortage of male and female nurses, how was the communication with the doctors?

Wilson [00:38:28]

Look, honestly, in that sense, eh, I didn't like it very much because they had this doctor who is very good, who was an internist, who was the one who was always showing her face but



rarely could I talk to the cardiologist, with the neurologist. Uh, in that sense, being able to talk to the specialists was a bit complicated because she would meet with them, they would tell her all the data, all the information, but in the end who always showed her face was her. And that, well, I saw it badly because I understand that if the cardiologist who did the treatment checked it, the neurologist, well, they should faced up and say: "Look, this is what is happening with your dad, these are the prognosis, this is what you should expect." But although the doctor was very good, I'm not taking credit away from the doctor right, but in that sense, well, since its a group of doctors they don't...And then, eh, on the weekends, well, no one gave me information about my dad, that is real, uh, honestly, the nurses were alone there, the female nurses and the male nurses. The doctors were hardly seen on weekends that I have there, well, I have to make criticism because I understand that a hospital should have doctors 24 hours.

Andrea [00:39:33]

Mhm. So, after those 21 days he, he, they discharge him and then what do you do? Does he return to the house? or How?

Wilson [00:39:44]

No, no. What happened is that my wife is a women, uh, she has her conditions and so my father was already in bed, when he arrived at the hospital he was not in bed, he was, he went to the bathroom, although one watched over him, he showered alone, he went to the bathroom and did his things alone but when he left the hospital we had to do everything for him, he had to have someone 24 hours and we didn't have the money to put him there. So I decided, consulting with my brother right, that we were going to put him in a home that although I always struggled and my fight was that I never wanted to put my dad in a home but I couldnt do anything else because I couldn't bring him to my house either because I didn't have the space, right. I decided to put him in a home, uh, he arrived at the home on Sunday and nothing at dawn from Wednesday to Thursday, well, the owner of the home calls me that my dad had died of a heart attack, uh, that in reality he only lasted four days at the home.

Andrea [00:40:36]

And how was the protocol at the home? could you visit him like...?

Wilson [00:40:42]

Honestly, the protocol was exasperating because they...My dad came into the home and if my dad, right, had been alive, they wouldn't let me see him for two or three months. He had to spend a quarantine, eh, their quarantine was literally 40 days. After that he had to be vaccinated and until he had the vaccines he could not receive visitors, so it was to put him there without me...it was only a phone call the first few days that I called the person in charge and what she told me: "He's fine, he's fine." But I couldn't see him, they weren't going to let me see him at first, eh, it was going to be very hard for me.

Andrea [00:41:18]

Yes, it sounds like a very difficult situation and for me it was too. So, eh, the last question I have prepared for, eh, for today, eh, we talked about how it was, right, when he had an open heart surgery when he was in the hospital in Pavía in San Juan...

Wilson [00:41:38]

In San Juan.

Andrea [00:41:39]

...And also how he was at, at the Medical Center in Mayagüez. Do you think there was a difference between those two times he was in the hospital and could you say that it was because of, of the pandemic?

Wilson [00:41:55]

Honestly, the, the, the stay in Santurce was like being in a Resort because they treated him like a king, I even had a comfortable reclining chair that I could lean back, they allowed me to take a bath in the hospital because obviously I was not from San Juan, uh, everything was different. But obviously there was no Covid, uh, I don't, with Covid I don't know how it would be like because then maybe there wouldn't be a lot of staff in that area because it was in San Juan in that area where there were more cases of Covid. But I can't blame the hospital in Mayagüez for much because honestly they didn't have many staff and they were dealing with what they could, but I can criticize is the doctor from Mayagüez versus San Juan, they always stood up to me, every day either the cardiologist came, or the internist, or the cardiovascular surgeon, uhm, the physiatrist who was going to give him the therapies, the respiratory therapist, they were always very responsible in, in caring for, for my father in San Juan. Uhm, and so in Mayagüez, well, I come back and say the same things, I criticize the doctors because you couldn't see their faces very much, but the nurses worked hard, they did what they could, and I helped them as much as I could because my dad, well, wasn't easy.

Andrea [00:43:09]

Okay. Well, these are all the questions that, well, that I have prepared for today. I want, right, before I finish, to thank you for taking from your time. I know that this is a very personal and very sentimental story. So we want to thank you for sharing your story. Eh, again I remind you that this interview was recorded and I am going to be sharing it with Dr. Ricia Chansky, who was, who is my English professor and when this finishes, well, I am going to be sharing the permission slip so that we see what the options are and you choose the one you feel most comfortable with. Thank you very much.

Wilson [00:44:53]

You're welcome.