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## Oral history interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón, October 1, 2021

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## ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

### Oral History Interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón, October 1, 2021

#### PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón, member of the community organization Come Colegial. The interview was conducted by graduate students Aleyshka Estévez, and Natalia M. Betancourt on October 1, 2021. This interview is part of a project headed by Dr. Ricia Chansky, a professor in the English Department 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 for: Interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón

Interview Date: Octubre 1, 2021

Interviewers: Natalia M. Betancourt Malavé and Aleyshka Estevez

AQ - Aleyshka Estevez Quintana

0:03 I'm going to start the recording to do a quick test.

Very good. Can you see if it's recording yet? Yeah.

LS - Lucy Serrano Gastón

0:21 Yes.

NMBM: Natalia M. Betancourt Malavé

0:21 And then, Lucy if you want to do a tests, I don't know if she could tell us your full name, where you were born, basic things like that so that we can have that test.

LS

0:26 Good morning, my name is Lucy Serrano Gastón.

I was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. I work at the University [of Puerto RICO] (UPRM) campus in Mayagüez in the Office of Graduate Studies and I am also the advisor of Come Colegial.

AQ

0:58 Perfect, I think that sounded fantastic.

NMBM

1:02 Yes, it sounds nice here too.

AQ

1:05 Well, Lucy, good morning, I ask you, how have you been? We had a situation with the electricity recently. How have you been feeling?

LS

1:23 Well, look, eh, I live in Cabo Rojo, but it's like between San German and Cabo Rojo, so since this transition to LUMA began, which, thank God, has only left me twice as much light, but those 2 times have been for several days. Both times they have been one for 3 days and the other for 2 days and that is equivalent to more or less what they are experiencing, the people are experiencing the blackouts.

You know it was two or three times, but there were quite a few days in a row.

Let's see 2 days the first time and the second time 3 times, but that would tell you that that was for summer more or less. But thank God I haven't come back, we haven't had these blackouts or anything like that. Well, also as a result of when this thing about María started, we had to build a little power plant and with that, well, we resolved those days.

But hey, I know that not everyone has has the purchasing power of an opportunity to have a plant, so this is strong and for the students, to be able to do this, because not many are at home. You know?

*Batallando*<sup>1</sup> to see what happens.

Can you hear me?

AQ

3:02 Yes, we can hear you perfectly. We are the same here and how does the food goes bad in the refrigerator, right?

That is a battle that is had.

LS

3:13 Also a couple of years ago, about 7 years ago. Before all this with hurricanes Maria and Irma we had to buy, we bought a freezer, so what we do is. At least in my refrigerator I don't use

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<sup>1</sup> "Batallando" is a common expression in Puerto Rico that refers to the everyday struggles.

the freezer to freeze meats. That's to make ice and other things, right sticks and things that go there.

But at least I put all my meats in a freezer that I have in a room and that's where we try, you know, because the meats last a long time there and we have to put ice and that freezer but it's not used, it doesn't open if the electricity goes out, it is not opened constantly and they last much longer. And really the generator, what we use it for is, really for that: a refrigerator, for a freezer and at least to be able to connect a fan to be able to sleep at night.

Girl, yes, because it's really a little strong and the system is very weak.

I, no, I don't understand how the electricity was before and we always complain because we always complain about everything, but the electricity didn't go out so much and now this company comes and like that constantly, so I don't understand. I think that the Puerto Ricans, hard-working people, and the Puerto Ricans who worked in the PREPA arena, what they did was mend and mend so that people would not be left without electricity. But these people now, I really don't, I don't understand that. I don't understand.

We'll see.

NMBM

5:02 Yes, it's very strange to me too, because at least I live in Bayamón.

LS

5:07 Mhm.

NMBM

5:07 And here it goes, they take it for four hours, they don't return it for four hours and they take it again for four hours and they've been like that all week and it doesn't make sense to me how it is that, I mean, how is it? that they have to ration it? If a couple of months ago there was enough for everyone?

That's what doesn't make sense to me.

LS

5:26 Me neither, I don't understand this.

I said, but yes, before after María, everything became normal.

Well, you know, they always didn't get along, so we don't have these problems and now that they changed it, which is a company, I understand that it is American, I don't know, I really don't know, I don't know.

Unless they are the same ones, what I talk about with my husband, who are the same ones who were left out of the electricity supply who are doing sabotage, because they talk like they know all the buggers on all the poles in all the areas in where you have to work. The famous guy machete that I don't know, he didn't even know what a machete was.

What they are doing is that my husband tells me that they don't come down and when they come down that light goes out to several sectors and I didn't know anything about that, that a machete on a pole.

So that's that. Let's see, I understand that these days there will also be a march.

Today I read that in front of the school gates there was going to be a march or something against LUMA, and it seems to me that in the coming weeks we will see if next week there will also be a march against Luma.

But it's going to happen in San Juan.

NMBM

6:45 I understand that this afternoon there is going to be one on Resistance Street, I understand, I had already seen a call for that and I had seen another one that I believe is on October 15. What is the Americas Expressway supposed to be? At least these are the ones I have heard, I didn't know about Mayagüez.

LS 7:08

Exactly, that same one. Is there anyone else missing for the meeting?

AQ 7:17 No.

NMBM 7:17 No, Chansky is at a conference, but afterward we give him the summary and breakdown of the interview.

LS 7:24 Okay, I'm eating a yogurt because I don't know how each one does, but nothing, but what are you asking me? Whatever you have to ask when you want to officially start, but let me know.

AQ 7:45 OK, but I think we can start.

Now we are recording.

LS 7:51 Perfect.

AQ 7:54 Very well, to start with Lucy Serrano Gastón, did you mention that she is living in Cabo Rojo where did you grew up?

LS 8:09 In Las Piedras there is a fairly large area.

In Mayagüez, that's close to... well, Post Street is so intense, it's so long, but that's close to where it is... where the Immigrants in Mayaguez, Río Cristal, I don't know if you know.

Over there, in that area it is a little alley in an alley within the Las Piedras slopes. In that sector there is a dead end, this one, a dead end called, they called it black cat, [laughs] black cat.

Then it went to a nicer official name, this Fábrega street, but there were only there, I tell you that there were about 40 houses on that little street and that street adjoins the back, with what is today the new Catholic University of Mayagüez .

That's where I grew up

NMBM 9:18 OK

LS 9:19 I grew up running around everything that is Catholic, all that was mountain [laughs] and that's where we grew up.

NMBM 9:31 So, you had told us that your family was from Ponce?

LS 9:36 Well, mom is from Mayaguez. My dad is also from Mayagüez, but mom's family on my father's side is from Ponce. The birthplace of Plena,<sup>2</sup> there in Ponce, a place called San Antón and that is, pure Black, girl, the Gastones are there.

He likes la bomba<sup>3</sup> and la plena! They are from over there. Yes.

But mom's mother was from Mayagüez. And my dad's parents are also from Maya, and so is my mother; my grandmother on my father's side is from Lajas. Neighborhood... oh my god I forgot... Palmares neighborhood in Lajas. And Papá, my paternal grandfather was from Mayagüez.

And I did all my elementary school at school in Las Piedras slopes. I went to my middle school, where next to the Walgreens in Barrio Sábalo there was a little school called Eucaristo Irizarry.

After seventh grade, they made the school that is in Río Cristal, I went to the Río Cristal school and from there I then went to the High School, the José de Diego school, which is no longer there, but that is where it is. This is the Immigrant Clinic in Mayagüez, in the back was the José Diego school, it is now closed and from there, this year I went to study at the Mayagüez school.

Anything else?

AQ 11:36 If I ask you why you mention this, your family from Ponce, your family from Mayagüez, what was it like to live in Mayagüez?

Your childhood in Mayagüez. What do you remember from your family's heritage?

LS 11:54 Oh, I enjoyed it, I remember... I [laughs] Girl, I had a good childhood, you know? I didn't have all the comforts because my parents were of limited means. My mother worked in a

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<sup>2</sup> Plena is one of the indigenous Puerto Rican dances with roots in African Culture.

<sup>3</sup> Bomba is one of the indigenous Puerto Rican dances with roots in African Culture.

Brassieres factory in Añasco, which was called MaidenForm. And my dad had a workshop, he owned a mechanics shop. We didn't have all the resources but I'll tell you one thing in my house, we never lacked anything.

I remember that within the neighborhood, you know, right? I start to compare and within all of us who live here in the neighborhood. Well, we were the ones who had a little more, but a little more purchasing power, as one says.

No, dad, thank God, he was doing very well in his mechanics shop. Dad, they knew him a lot, because he specialized, I mean, he did other things, but he specialized in transmissions and for the time being. I was born in '67, I'm 54, but for me that he was well valued as a mechanic.

Well, mom was a worker and she earned well at that time. I remember that we never lacked anything and whenever we asked for something. Never, no, I don't hear them saying no because there is no money, it was always like: "behave well, it's your turn, do this task." "Do this," "do that," "you have to earn it" and [they always gave us] what we always asked for. Well yes, but it was like a trueque<sup>4</sup>, it was my sister's turn to throw out the trash, it's your turn and that's how we did it and I'll tell you more.

My mother has been an orphan since she was 18 years old.

And mom, and dad and mom; dad says my mom was orphaned and my mom's brothers because of this my mom had to take care of the 3 brothers, take charge there, as soon as mom was left orphan... eh well mom's mom, the father died, the father was not present in their lives. Well no, no. He was not present in their lives and mom had to take care of the 3 brothers.

Dad immediately married mom.

And mom, dad. They were neighbors. And mom dad, they have been dating since the first grade and have been together their entire lives. This story is always mom, dad, they always tell it to me. Yes, they are both alive, thank God. My grandmother, when she was alive she also told it to me. I say the paternal grandmother.

Mom and dad took care of her 3 brothers, then, well, I was born, my sister was born, there were 5 of us, you know because all the brothers were minors.

I grew up with my uncles.

15:12 The relationship that I have with my uncles, right now I have two who are already deceased, right. But the relationship with them was like brothers, we fought like brothers, that wasn't what we were like, man, if we said it, "he's my uncle", but we played the same way with you. Of mom's 3 brothers, the one who is alive, the one [inaudible] was simply everything. It's more to tell you but I walked with my, with my uncle when we both graduated from school.

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<sup>4</sup>This term means barter.

Mom went [and laughs] my uncle graduated and I graduated. Both at the same time. So the relationship is like brothers. His children ask me for my blessing, they call me aunty because it was always a sibling relationship. I went to school parties and I was going to party with my uncle. And people didn't believe he was my uncle, they thought he was my boyfriend, and he was my uncle.

Well, it was a good childhood... among all the things that happened in the family, it was a beautiful, healthy childhood. I don't know... and I'm going to tell you more about everyone in the neighborhood where I live, where I grew up in a very poor area.

And the only ones, right, not to brag or anything like that, the only ones who didn't fall into drugs were me, it was us in the house. All the other people, all those who stayed with the neighborhood, with us, all fell into drugs, I see some of them who are already dead, but they all fell into vices.

You know? And my parents were always there, very present, very present all the time, emphasizing "you have to study, you have to study" and thank God, we all had university degrees.

17:16 Well, and we continue, my brother is my blood brother, he did not attend university but he finished his fourth year, he has had his job for years at the Perea clinic.

His daughter also studied at school. My other cousins, who are like my nephews, all finished university. There is one who is my niece, my niece, she is a pediatric cardiologist at Miami Children's Hospital. In fact, right now talking to you minutes ago, he sent me a text. I have another one who has a doctorate in industrial engineering from Michigan State and is working there at the University of Michigan. I have another who has a master's degree in physical education, another a master's degree in accounting.

NMBM

18:08 Yes, excuse me.

I wanted to know if you could also tell us the names and ages of your uncles, your brothers, your nephews, so we can have that in record while you continue giving us their descriptions.

LS

Yes, well look my brother, I am 54 years old and my brother is a year younger than me. His name is Carlos Serrano. My aunt, mom's sister who grew up with me, we slept together in the room, her name was Isabel Acosta, she passed away. She was the registrar of the Adventist University of the Americas in Mayagüez. I have another uncle who passed away, she also grew up with me in the house, his name is Guillermo Soto.

They are all mom's brothers through the mother's side, they are from different fathers, but mom raised them all and in my house there was never a blood difference. You are my brother, mom

never believed in saying half sibling, you are my brother and that's it. Another one who is alive is called Antonio Acostó, he is a CPA, he works right now in San Juan, I forgot the company but it is an insurance company.

Four years ago he was also in a very important insurance company, I don't remember the initials but he was the president at the Caribbean and Puerto Rico level. He is a CPA but specialized in the insurance area. Insurance like corporations that are insurance, these are companies that are worldwide because I know that he has traveled to England and to Colombia while he was working with the companies. Many times he is in the United States but it is very good, so their children. One called Daliz Sanatana, a pediatric cardiologist who studied at the UPR College of Mayagüez and Medical Sciences. There is Antonio Acosta, Adriana Acosta and there is Yadrana Acosta. The last names, as I told you, are different because they are mom's brothers on their mother's side.

What else can I tell you?

AQ 21:35

It sounds like you grew up in the house with many people, you had your three uncles and brothers, I ask you what the meals were like in your house, how did they manage to feed so many people?

LS

Well, I tell you, mom is an exquisite cook, mom cooks exquisitely. So and mom, as I told you, many know her in Mayagüez because she has made *pasteles*<sup>5</sup> all her life, she has made *pasteles* at home all year long, and mom has made *pasteles* all her life. She has a *pasteles* business, smaller now because she is older but she always continues.

We divided the tasks when we were older, me and I called her Chavez, her name was Isabel. Between Chavez and me, mom left at 5 am to work in Añasco and left us with our paternal grandmother and she, my grandmother was our neighbor, we lived in the same alley and she took care of us. We went to school and I remember that from the 5th grade or so I was already cooking and so was my aunt. Because mom arrived at my house at 5pm and dad arrived around that time and we had to leave the food ready.

Mom taught us how to make white rice and marinate meat and so we were integrating into the kitchen. And there were tasks that you had to do because before it was, as we say, they gave you a hard time,

(23:48) they didn't give you that, you know? I remember because I was very naughty and I remember quite a few hits that I received. And that it had to be done. So we agreed, on the refrigerator she left us a piece of paper with the tasks. So Chavez, who was a little bigger than

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<sup>5</sup>This term refers to a traditional Puerto Rican dish, traditionally made with a green banana masa and pork filling, wrapped in a banana leaf.

me, had to make the white rice, I had to marinate the meats, it was almost always my turn to marinate the meats. And at least when mom arrived everything was basically done. What mom did was fry meats or stew the meat and make the grains and so little by little we integrated into the kitchen since 6th grade, since 5th grade.

24:45 I remember that when I was.... I reached 7th grade and started taking home economics class. In that home economics class they previously taught us cooking, how to cook, how to sew, sew by hand, how to sew on the sewing machine. One of the first gifts I had as a child when... I had a sewing machine, girl.

Mom always liked sewing. And I'm going to be honest with you... I was dying for a sewing machine and then when they gave me a very cool little Singer, and I made my things for the dolls and but it was never my thing, girl. That seam didn't fit me and I remember that mom grabbed me by the ears and pulled them, and said to me, "But why are you working so quickly?" "Work softer" because that looked like Rincón's curves in my seams. Horrible, I mean sewing was never my thing.

They didn't come out manually either. And in my home economics class I had to make a robe and it was a robe with two towels. And it was simply taking the seam on both sides of the towels, gluing them and putting the elastic on top. Look, girl, I'm going to tell you something. I remember that mom started helping me and I took those towels off like three or four times, mom made me take them off because the seams looked horrible on me.

And mom came back "No, take them off." "Take them off," but with everything and that, no, and I remember that I hit this moment remembering that moment as if I tried to cry because I said I'm giving up, this is not my thing, I can't. "Look, Lucy, I can't handle you anymore."

Mom made my robes, she sewed them for me, and I went to school with my robe and they gave me an A. But I knew that I hadn't made it, you understand that mommy did it because I made those horrible seams.

But nevertheless, in the kitchen, there I stood out.

27:11:00 When it was our turn to make a flan. We had to make a flan, and to this day that is the same recipe that I use for my flan. The same recipe. My friends and my family are crazy about my flan, they go on a trip because they love it. I have tried it. I'm going to tell you one thing, my flan is something else.

My flan is exquisite. I don't know about others but it tastes great when I make it, and for all the family activities with my friends for all the things "What should I bring?" "Oh, bring a flan! Bring a pumpkin flan, a cheese flan or whatever flavor you want." The flans I make are exquisite and it is the same recipe that the teacher gave me when I was in sixth grade... in seventh grade.

Also in that home economics class they divided us into groups, I remember there were like 6 or 7 stoves. They were electric stoves in the living room and they made us cook. The first time they

made us cook, they asked who knew, obviously I was in sixth grade and I was very polished because at home Mom made us cook from early on.

The group was like groups of 4 or 5, and then from that group I remember that they took me out as a leader because I knew how to cook and the other girls didn't know how to cook. And I remember that what we made was rice with spam, and I still remember that moment. Because that rice with spam was so exquisite that we ate our hearts out there. They gave us A. And I'm going to tell you something else, my favorite dish, my gourmet dish, I'm dying for rice with spam at this point. I love it, I don't know about you but I love rice with spam, and here I can hardly make it anymore because my husband doesn't eat spam. If I remember that, well, I remember it very happy, it was very nice because I even remember the faces and well, even the pegao we ate, we had to scrape it off to eat it. We ate it among our fellow students.

And then, what else do you want to know? Ask me why I'm going on a trip, I'm going on a trip.

NMBM 29:59:00 Yes, apart from that recipe for flan and rice with spam. What other recipes or foods like that did you like when you were little? What did you like to cook at home for your family?

LS 30:16:00

Well, look, since I was little, after middle school I cooked everything. I dared to, I started making *empanadillas* obviously, pizza filled *empanadillas* that one makes with meat filled *empanadillas*. rice with pigeon peas because well, my family every year, dad already... dad eh, I still haven't... like I tell you... he follows the tradition but modifies it.

Well, my dad throughout our lives has always killed a pig at Christmas. All my life, and that pig was for making *pasteles* to make *morcilla*<sup>6</sup>. Since I was little, I already knew the entire process of making *morcilla* and that was a pain in the ass because I didn't want to deal with the pig's intestines. And mom was, I tell her, "Mom, that right now, that's abuse, you put me there to remove the excrement from the pigs' intestines."

And I'm going to tell you one thing, that was really horrible. And I had to put the intestines in my mouth to blow it, okay? That was a very disgusting process and mom made me do it with her.

And everyone ate the *morcilla* except me because I remembered all that trouble that I had to go through all that suffering to prepare those *morcilla*. She sent me and my sister to the mountains, my brothers, my uncles to look for orange leaves, guava leaves because all that mess in the intestines had to be cleaned later so that the bad smell of the excrement would go away.

And then we had to put them in guava leaves, in orange leaves and I would go through the mountains with my brothers and my uncles to look for all that, we would return with bags full of those leaves so mom would leave them there for a while, tell you maybe an hour or hour and a

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<sup>6</sup> This term refers to traditional Puerto Rican blood sausage.

half mom would leave the intestines out. Then we had to blow them out because the one that was broken couldn't be seen to see if the air came out. Because if it was broken, it couldn't be used to make *morcilla* because the blood would leak out.

So, oh, I tell you that I'm here making faces because I swear that the whole process is about collecting the blood and seeing when daddy put that stake in the piglet and I came out screaming.

Dad scolding me "Don't shout! He's going to stay alive!"

I imagined that the pig was going to be alive all its life because I kept screaming and screaming and screaming. And mom locked me in the room so that I wouldn't see how dad killed the pig because I kept screaming. [Laughing] I swear it was a beautiful but traumatic childhood, you see? So, those guts, then fill them – oh baby! Afterwards you had to boil them so that they became hard. And after they were boiled they were fried, so I know how to do the whole process.

You know that who later did it with mom, because look it was so traumatic and the smells were so unpleasant and they stayed in the house no matter how much I cleaned, that afterwards I always said to mom, "Mom tell me what day they are going to kill the pig." and mom says "Such a day" Do you know why? That day I made up whatever it was and I went to sleep at one of my friends' houses so I wouldn't be there on the day they killed the pig in my house.

Because that was a bad smell and a horrible thing, and then as an adult I mm no, no one forces me to deal with pig intestines and *morcilla*. But my niece, my brother's daughter, had been working with the *morcilla* with mom since she was little, happily. and mom tells me, "Look how she does it and she doesn't get angry or disgusted or anything.

And you were always screaming and saying what a bad smell. And you didn't want to deal with *morcillas*." And my niece, who is now about 25 years old, was the one who helped her. And she already graduated from school and everything, she has her job and in recent years she is the one who is going to help mom with the *morcilla* process. So that well we made *morcilla*.

35:14:00 But he has still followed that tradition because dad already has his [health] conditions and can't kill a pig. What he does is that a friend of his always breeds, for example this Christmas he brings him the dead pig. They give him the casing, the blood and all those things to make the *morcilla*. And he is immediately sending money to the man, paying him a piglet to raise for next year. And he raises it, buys it a year in advance, raises it and brings it back for Christmas already dead so that it can continue with its tradition.

I always remember that in my house there was always Christmas grocery shopping too. Always since I was little. And we enjoyed that purchase because it was a purchase, we bought all the typical Christmas sweets, all those hazelnuts, walnuts, the sweets, mom made *coquito*<sup>7</sup> and gave *coquito* as gifts. And daddy's grandmother made- they called it a Christmas *Aguinaldo*<sup>8</sup>. I helped

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<sup>7</sup> This term refers to a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas drink made from coconuts.

<sup>8</sup> This term refers to a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas gift.

grandma, I helped daddy's mother when she gave the *Aguinaldo*. Towards *almojabanas*<sup>9</sup> I made coconut candy, I made *arroz con dulce*<sup>10</sup>, which is rice with [...]. She wrapped it in aluminum foil, lined it and gave it to the neighbors and that was her Christmas *Aguinaldo*.

And mom still continues with the tradition, although mom always makes those typical sweets for Christmas and gives her friends and neighbors a little plate with those things and mom says that that is the *Aguinaldo*. In fact, although I don't, I don't do it...I do it. I usually do it and I always take it to my mom and I give it to the two neighbors - I give it to the neighbor across the street and to the neighbor next door, I take it to the office and to a few friends.

I don't have a tradition as such, it is when I get the desire that, I have the craving to eat *almojabanas* and make *arroz con dulce* because I prepare it and distribute it. But it's not that I have it fixed to give it fixed on such a day as such. Mom always likes to give it between the 23rd, 24th and 25th. She likes to give that *Aguinaldo*. And I also learned to make *almojabanas* with her, I learned to make *arroz con dulce*, coconut rice, I make *dulce de lechosa*<sup>11</sup>. I make traditional sweets and you know I make everything. I'm not afraid of anything, I make *sorullitos*<sup>12</sup>, *empanadillasa*, *bacalaitos*<sup>13</sup>.

NMBM 38:49 All that sounds delicious, I already want it to be Christmas. [Everyone laughs]

AQ 38:56 Where do you buy your ingredients or where do you get the ingredients to make all these things?

LS 38:59:00

All the ingredients because I love going to the market squares, girl. My mother and my grandmother every Saturday I remember my whole life, my whole life. While my grandmother was alive, dad's mother who lasted 99 years. Well, since the 90s I couldn't go out like that anymore, I wasn't as whole as one says. But all my life I went every Saturday with my grandmother without fail to the Mayagüez market square.

I love the Mayagüez market square. Still at this point there are people there who are older or have children, you know, or there are...well, the one who stayed like that is called Minguito. That man, the son is there right now, but as an adult I went with mom and he told me, "Oh, la negrita, I remember when you came with the grandma."

My grandmother took me every Saturday and for me that was ugh, how nice to go to the market square. I love market squares. They already know me in Cabo Rojo. As soon as I moved to Cabo Rojo 21 years ago, I looked up where the market square was and the people in the market square already knew me.

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<sup>9</sup> This term refers to a Puerto Rican dish consisting of rice fritters.

<sup>10</sup> This term refers to a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas dessert made with rice, raisins and cinnamon.

<sup>11</sup> This term refers to a candy made from green papaya.

<sup>12</sup> This term refers to corn fritters.

<sup>13</sup> This term refers to cod fritters.

40:29 My dad's little piece of land is not very big, but he plants little things here. And since they live like in the countryside now, Río Hondo is a rural area, and in the countryside many people plant crops. And since they are neighbors like that and they are like that in the countryside, they give you, they keep you. They send you if they know what you like, "Save such a thing for la negrita" la negrita they call me [laughter]. If not, then supermarket, but when they are traditional things I try to get them like this in market places. And when I travel, if I travel and it is not to the United States, I try to look in the market places.

I really love going to market squares.

AQ 41:17 On those trips, have you had a recent trip where you had such an interesting food acquisition?

LS

41:22 Well recently...well there hasn't been any after the pandemic, the pandemic I haven't been able to travel but...in the year...well yes in Maria's year. That December of Maria I had a trip, a cruise for that week when the hurricane arrived and I postponed it. I had never said goodbye to the year on a cruise and we decided to postpone it until this December for New Year's Eve.

And if I wanted to go back to Dominica, when I went to Dominica I wanted to go back to an area that is like a market square. Because Dominica is one of the Caribbean island countries where it is very famous for its spice market. I had previously gone to Dominica and I had searched and previously I had gone and whenever I go to travel I like to search and learn about that country. And I wanted to go back to a market like this in Dominica and girl I bought, I didn't buy, the truth was that I didn't buy much but...go see the markets, the smells and things like that.

Oh I love it!

But on that one as such I didn't buy, on that trip I didn't buy. But I did want to go back to the market square area because...oh because the smells and all that and well I like the cuisine. But don't buy as such.

43:06:00 When I went to, on one occasion I went to Mexico and I went to a market like that, and I bought a couple of things. On one occasion when I went to Europe I went to Barcelona which has one of the market squares, right now I don't remember the name, but they have a great square.

On the Rambla? Oh, I don't remember the name right now.

Oh girl, I almost stayed there to live, I wanted to eat everything. I wanted to eat it all. Those smells are delicious. But it's a square, it's not a small square, the one in Mayagüez is beautiful because it has two floors and it's big, it's pretty, oh girl, but that square in Barcelona, on the Rambla, was like three floors.

That was one thing, oh virgin girl, I almost had a heart attack on that trip. I wanted to bring all the Serrano hams that were there, girl [longing dramatically] Those smells!

The breads!

Everything delicious.

I love food.

I think I'm in the wrong area but at this point I couldn't do it.

44:18 I tried a couple of years ago, I would say 15 years, I have been at school for 30 years. But there was a time when I wanted to go study this culinary arts but unfortunately the scholarships no longer covered me. And at that time, I didn't have the money to do it. But I did make the arrangements but I could no longer receive a scholarship because I had already used it.

So I had to pay for it out of my pocket and I said to myself like mmm [mnm no] “Negra, keep watching your magazines.” I have a collection of cook books, “Keep watching your cooking shows and do it as a hobby.”

NMBM

45:12 So most of the experience you've had learning to cook has been more casual, not traditional training like professional chefs have.

[LS: (in agreement) No no.]

I would like to know if you can tell me about a time when you remember a special recipe that you have learned or a style of food that you have learned to make, either with your mother or your family.

LS

45:38:00 Well, look, for example, dulce de lechosa is one of my favorites – apart from the cheese flan, which is my favorite – the other is dulce de lechosa with white cheese. I don't know if you have tried it, do you like it?

AQ and NMBM

45:52 I've never tried it. I've heard of it but I've never eaten it.

LS

45:56:00 The taste of lechosa with the Puerto Rican white cheese...My God! Many restaurants still offer it, when you go to Joyuda they offer it. They offer flans, they also have casquitos de guayaba, although they are more in the gourmet area but still typical as one criollos say. I like the casquitos de guayaba with cheese, the lechosa, the dulce de lechosa. But as I say, I like it but I don't... as I say, how can I tell you... if it's very soft, no. Like I eat it but like it's not right.

Now if you give me a dulce de lechosa it has to be green, the green papaya. It's like it's shocking, it's like it's crispy, girl it's like a little hard. That [piece of candy] comes out a little hard and not everyone knows how to do it. So I told mom, “mom, but I've tried it.” and then I started doing it at home. And I said well, I'm going to do it, it's good because I remember taking it to the office and everyone was crazy about the dulce de lechosa. That was a couple of years ago.

But I told her, mom, I did it and it turned out good. I brought a little to her because every time I do something I bring a little to her. And then I took it to her and mom said “It tastes good but you didn't make it hard.” and I say “Mom but that's what happens” mom tells me “That's the secret.”

47:40:00 I mean, moms still sometimes have their tips, their secrets so that... Mom tells me “you have to put it in..” [Continues to give the secret of how to make the lechosa candy hard] before boiling the lechosa and adding all the ingredients, you have to leave the lechosa slices for at least 15 minutes... You have to leave them in water with...with...oh god-Baking soda!

With that baking soda.

You have to leave it with baking soda, the water with baking soda in it and then you will see. You pour all that water on him and start preparing the candy” And I “Really!?” Well, girl, can you believe me that I did it like that, and girl, the candy turned out the way I like it. It's kind of hard, I mean moms have, at least mom when I have doubts because she gives me her little secrets.

48:34:00 My niece really loves eggplant lasagna, and it is exquisite to me. So this- Oh, I kind of give myself a lot of compliments, right? Well, you have to know when you do things right and when you do things wrong [Laughs].

Then she tells me, 'Oh aunty, I like how you make eggplant lasagna.

“Mom tried to make it for me and she had a mess of a lot of water.”

And I said, “Oh, I'm going to tell you what the secret is.”

And then what I do with the eggplant lasagna is - because obviously the eggplant is a vegetable that has a lot of liquid - what I do is dehydrate it.

“And how do you dehydrate it?”

And I tell her, “Girl, the simplest thing is when you pick up the eggplant, you chop it into [slices]. You add a little water, after you have it all chopped you add a little water and you are not going to leave them submerged in a lot of liquid. You leave them in a little bit of water, you sprinkle salt on those eggplants and you leave them for the space of an hour covered in a container with a lid with aluminum foil.

And you will see what is going to happen.”

And she says to me “really?” Yes!

When you go at the time and uncover all the water, baby, those eggplants have thrown everything away. because you're going to wet it a little and splash it and you add the salt and you're going to see how that container is. That container is going to be full of water because the eggplants have dumped all their liquid. What I do is then take the eggplant and dry it with a paper towel. And so after I dry it, I sauté it a little in olive oil or put it on the grill depending on my mood. And then I prepare the normal lasagna, with the meat, the sauce and everything.

Look girl, those eggplants are, that lasagna is exquisite, exquisite, exquisite. and it is not submerged in liquid nor does it come out hard.

Girl it comes out great.

50:50:00 And well, that's how I spend my time watching a lot of television programs, on cable, on YouTube, whatever, on Facebook, watching cooking videos about cooking things.

I love it.

AQ 51:06 Lucy I ask you, because as you say, you cook these fantastic things and you love giving them to the people you love, and I ask you when you go to a restaurant, what do you expect from a restaurant? Because you cook everything, you do it so magnificently that when you go to restaurants, well, what is your impression?

LS

51:28:00 I'm going to be very honest with you, I love going out to eat, but do you know that, for example, my husband tells me, "We're going to go eat at Joyuda today, mamaá, do you want me to take you out today?" Because I spend time in the kitchen, I don't care when he asks me for something, I'll prepare it for him.

Sometimes I get a bit stubborn but I prepare it, I love cooking. "So you don't cook today, I'll take you out to eat, are we going to Joyuda or something?" Well, look, you know, I'm going to be honest, I don't really like it, do you know why? Because sometimes I feel like a little bit frustrated because when I go, it's like I don't know what production they have. It's more than sales. You know?

Like I find that what I'm going to eat I can make and it will turn out better. Well my husband tells me "You make it better than Joyuda." and I do everything. This week on Monday I made him...on Monday I arrived and I started to make a shrimp salad but big ones they are not small shrimp. And I made a salad, and I prepared, I bought the octopuses and I made an octopus salad. And he's been there for two days, what's left is a little bit today, that was like Tuesday I think.

And the shrimp salad, well, I try to buy it - because I like it, I don't buy them pre-cooked, I buy the shrimp raw, I remove the shells, here I look for the tripe, I don't boil them like that for much more than ten - I let the water be I put the water hot, I turned off the stove and I put the shrimp

in. When I see that the hull is pink, I take it off because if it doesn't it will overcook. And I really try not to go, I don't go much.

My husband invites me but what I like are *chinchorritos*.<sup>14</sup>

53:26:00 For example, I'm going to eat some ribs there. go eat pork, because I almost never do that, roast pork, on the stick, whatever they want to do it. No, because I think that no-that if it is something that I can do that I do it, then it will be better for me. So it's like she's also, not that she's stingy but, to say that I'm going to pay 40 dollars, 50 dollars for a dish that gives me enough to make for you, for me and there are leftovers for the week. Because I don't know, do you understand what I want to tell you? I think I can do it better or the same or better and I prefer to save the money.

NMBM

54:13 [In Agreement] Yes, of course. And sorry for interrupting

LS 54:19 Aha, tell me

NMBM 54:20 I wanted to ask you, what is your favorite food now as an adult? That you make it, or if perhaps there is a restaurant so special that the food is exquisite that you go there to eat that dish only?

LS

54:34:00 Well look, now as an adult I have several dishes. I did one last week, which is the cod serenade [in satisfaction] oh girl, I love the cod serenade. Well, I did and I remember that my boss took it to Dr. Nancy Vicente loves it. And I took some to her and, ohh, she told me [affectionate nickname, Diva] “Ohh [Diva] how does this turn out for you, this is Delicacy of the Gods.” She was shivering.

I really love the cod serenade and the other thing I really like is the chicken fricassee. The chicken fricassee, I love how the chicken fricassee turns out. The other thing I really like is rice with chicken but prepared by me. Because when I do it I do it with, uh, I don't do it with water. That's a recipe - I adapted that one.

55:36:00 When I make rice with chicken, girl, the best thing to cook are the Medallas. The best beer to cook with is Medallas. And I put the rice with - instead of putting water on the rice with chicken, when you make it, add Medalla beer, girl. [Longing dramatically and deeply] Instead of water, Medalla, you guys are going to me, and that rice with chicken leaves me with drunken rice as I call it. It tastes spectacularly.

With some homemade beans, I really like that one. And the other thing that I love, that I love, that I love, are the crabs. It doesn't matter how they give them to me. boiled whatever, and last

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<sup>14</sup>This term refers to an eating and drinking establishment that makes local and traditional cuisine, usually fried appetizers.

week mommy made me rice with crabs with crabs in salmorejo on the side, with beans and a avocado. You know what it's like to have them call you and tell you, "Come on in, I have what you like." I ran there, girl. [Laughs out loud] I love that a lot.

56:33:00 But then the restaurants I like to go to, in fact I went in the summer but what I went to was the brunch part. The restaurant that I like to go to but it has changed a lot... it's more because of the location because it is a spectacular, beautiful restaurant, very nice and facing the sea. But the chef has changed a lot. It's called Eclipse, which is in Villa Montaña in Isabela. That restaurant is spectacular but the chef has changed a lot, before I went a lot because I loved the seafood risotto they make. They make a spectacular seafood risotto. I had never eaten something so delicious...

[the call is cut off for a second, there is no audio.]

57:47 But I haven't been there in a while. And right now, when I want to go eat seafood, the one I really like is I go to Nautica, here in Joyuda I love that one. And my husband also really likes it and that's the one we go for. But usually we go around in a *chinchorro*. In the food trucks, I spend my time watching what is going on with the new food trucks that are out there. I have a lot of food truck tourism pages on my Facebook, things like that, I check what's out there and that's where we go.

NMBM 58:33 Excuse me, Lucy, it just got intermittent at the moment, I don't know if it was just me, when you were talking about the restaurant after the seafood risotto.

I don't know if it was just me, Aleyska?

LS 58:45

Well, I went there just for the seafood risotto, but they kind of changed the chef and the last times I've gone it's been because I'm in the area, we go early and so when I'm walking we've gone like this to the brunch they have in Eclipse. But not anymore, with the times *mija* I tell you that I prefer to eat in any *chinchorro* out there, any food truck or something like that. No, no, it's not like those stages either, one goes through different stages in life and not that one gets more stingy but now everywhere one wants they are also selling things that are very expensive for what they are.

59:32:00 So yeah relax sometimes even we do go out the bakery here next to where I live that makes some amazing sandwiches. And I called him, we ordered two sandwiches, we ate the little sandwich and we take off from there and leave.

AQ Lucy, you are talking a lot like that about going out with your husband, secrets with your family, sharing those food secrets, I ask you, what is the experience of eating with your family?

What do they get together?

LS

Everyone is in a different situation, but right now the family is not large, there is my brother, who lives in Añasco with his husband and daughter, my uncle, who is in San Juan and this one and her children are also there with their children apart. I'm already here in Cabo Rojo. My husband's family is from Las Marias. What we do is more for special occasions. I think for like mothers, father, birthdays... [unintelligible] birthday was last week. We brought them their gift.

She always brings something to cook around there or I also take things to her. That's what I brought her, it was very funny, it's a mother's gift. For me, it was at noon, a hors d'oeuvre factory, and they make it very delicious, and my mother's gift was a box of 50 *sorullitos*, a box of 50 *empanadillas*, a box of 50 cheese balls. So I bring them a few things, boxes of different things because they like a half [portion], mom is older now.

LS

And she could be, as I tell you, they are already alone in the house and I know that they like these things and I know they don't have to do a lot of work so I leave them there and for example when we go, when we go on weekends well you take [the frozen food], the least we have to do is fry, that's not what we are there for [to create more labor for the parents]. Hors d'oeuvres, things for us to eat, so that [making the food] wouldn't take her away, so that there wouldn't have a lot of work.

You know why? She likes it, she loves it, she is preparing in 3 months, but she no longer has the same skills as before anymore well, they're older now, you know? In order to simplify their work of the little things she always receives us with when we come over, she likes to host, you know.

And but the general thing, well always as I tell you, always at Christmas. New Years, Christmas, Christmas Eve, some days, the that almost all families in Puerto Rico get together, but we are not like that every Saturday and Sunday, well no, because we are all already doing different things.

You know, everyone has their commitments. They also have times that they share too, for example, I can with my husband, I have to share with the family, you just have to have. Like you have to have a certain level with him.

I can't remember the word you know, it's like you can days, so we need to be with my husband's family, the same thing happens to everyone else in the family because well but they already have to divide themselves to please everyone.

But the normal, we always spend it with a lot of food. Girl, always, always, everything and in general, everyone cooks on another world and you know that it is the most delicious thing that everyone has and you get this.

For example, my uncle who grew up with my mom makes a salad, he makes a spectacular macaroni salad, very different, very delicious, but it's always up to YOU, Toño, the macaroni salad is up to you. I always get the potato salad because they love my potato salad and my cheese

flan. That is what I always bring. Mom still has to make the rice, pigeon beans, and lately it's also my turn to do the turkey girl in the last few Thanksgivings... I've been doing it for years.

So, I buy it, mom, anyone buys it, buys it, "I left it at mom's house so you can make it." ok It's okay, I do it, she knows it, but usually my niece makes a very delicious pumpkin pie, so it's your turn to make the pumpkin pie. And like that we divide among ourselves the different foods. It's always a lot of food, it was a lot of food.

Wonderful.

AQ And I see that you, your niece and your uncle graduated from Colegio and I want to know a little bit about your experience at the University, what was it like to be at the University?

LS

Well um... Once you are in, I think this also happens to you, once you are in the campus its like, like they tell you in the freshman orientations its because they inject you with sangre verde you know. Well, I studied there [UPRM]. Eh

The experience there was nice. As I tell you, I still have a lot, I don't have many friends from my highschool class. From the high school, very few of us got in. There were few of us that got into [the University]. I got into the Business College. Very few of us got in. But I came from a program that was a secretarial program at the high school, because before there were what was Accounting Secretary, marketing [courses].

And then, well, I come from a high school program that was for secretarial work, and then I continued through Colegio. In that area yes, secretarial sciences. So the rest who were able to enter [the University] they were from the general area, what they called general, that they weren't from a program like the one I was already in. And well, some you know them by sight, but it's not that it is not that we were close friends, you know.

So no, and we didn't know each other. At least I began to make new friendships. And those who studied with us, one knows them by sight, you know? At least for me by sight, but no, no. I only had one, one who also studied secretarial skills with me at José de Diego.

We entered Colegio at the same program, that is, the secretary sciences and she already retired this the summer, but we have always been friends since the High School, best friends until today, because until today and she already retired from the campus, that is she went to make a life in the United States, and we always call each other every Monday or Tuesday, always, no longer, we don't call each other Monday or Tuesday this because she, even though she retired, a 52-year-old young girl from [the University].

You know what that's like?

After 30 years, she said: "I'm leaving, I don't want this one anymore" so she retired. She went to the United States. She's already working very well, girl. She already got a job there and we

always call on Mondays and Tuesdays, which is a holiday, those days are free. Well, in the afternoon we catch up and it has been shared with her. In fact, when I didn't have a car, she lived in Mayagüez, I remember when she was the one took me places. She gave me ride to go to Colegio in Mayagüez.

And as I told you, I was vice president of the Secretary's association on Campus. At that time, I was vicepresident twice, for two years. This memory is one of the beautiful experiences that many people don't know about, huh?

I was in the Job Fair. I was part of the committee that created the Job Fair.

The Job Fair has its history. It was created by 10 students that were presidents or vicepresidents of different associations on campus. In that occasion, I was VicePresident of one association and I got together with 9 more students and we created the first Job Fair [for the University]. It was a very nice, very, nice experience and one that left a lot of money. The second year when we wanted to do it, the administration did not allow us to continue with the Job Fair. EH?

And the current director and the one who retired from placements know the story. And they say it. I remember that we have talked about it and they say "yes Lucy, Lucy, I remember when you were on that committee that made up that group, that created that first Job Fair." After the second Job Fair, we couldn't do it again, you know? And I tell everyone for the simple reason, because they left a lot of money for the time and what we did was we divided it between the 10 associations that did everything, they did all THAT and we did it in the Mayagüez Resort. We did it with an activity in a restaurant in Joyuda like they do it now for when the companies come, the day before they do a party and this and that. But we did all those things and we were students.

I was the secretary of this committee, for that group and then this one they didn't let us do it simply because you know it, when there is some generates quick money, the administration wants to get its hands in it. And no, they didn't let us do it anymore. They continue doing it, but that is a gold mine.

If for the time it was, you can imagine. It turned 30, turned 30 years old, not long ago, the Job Fair. Imagine the bill of that, I tell everybody.

The bill for the Job Fair at the campus right now that generates long thousands, but thousands, thousands, I'm telling you. Because that first time we had a revenue after paying all the expenses, there were 10 associations and, for each association, we received USD\$2,500. You can imagine all the money we generated.

AQ Lucy a couple of things that I want to ask from there because it was a, it seems like it was a bit of an experience, first of all Where did it come from where you saw the need to do the Job Fair? Where did that idea come from?

LS

Because after so many years... I entered the Colegio in 1981. Well, it did not exist, there wasn't an agency coming to campus to help us. You know, the students needed to make their own negotiations... to begin looking for a job. To begin sending resumes, to deliver them by the hand, because before there was no such thing as email. You had to do it yourself, taking it to companies, girl. Send it by mail, well by postal mail this one, because that it did not exist. And we saw the need for us to integrate, for the companies to come, because we did know that many of our colleagues were graduating and leaving to... to...good companies outside of Puerto Rico.

And so, little by little, we decided to come together and that came out and truly what resulted was very nice, very nice. Many companies came. And we approached them ourselves and we would tell them: "do you want to be the main sponsor?" We had it divided, equally, platinum sponsor or gold; or you have to pay a certain amount.

We started sending this proposal. We spent about a year, when that was the case and we started sending letters and letters to companies by postal mail with the proposal of when we had everything ready had. We had already separated the Mayagüez Resort. The companies that came to put up the booths.

Well, all of that.

It was very uphill.

We spent a year organizing it...

LS

But we achieved it and a lot of companies came. I would tell you that for that first time, I remember that around 30 companies came and that was a tremendous achievement. Tremendous achievement. Because now, you know, that more than 100 companies come during October, a lot of them come.

And so we started to do what we had from a certain amount. If you want to come, if you don't want to participate in the social activities that we have for you, then this is the cost if you want to participate in this. If you want the promotions to come out in, for us to promote your company, because this amount has to be more or less like what they do now. Because it is practically the same, because really not, because we did it too the activities for the recruiters, social activities and all those things and we did them in Joyuda at that time in a very famous restaurant called Bahía del Sol. I think its name, its no longer there. This one and it was good, always nice, we did everything, practically the same as it is done now. The only thing is that well.

[Original recording was cut from 01:24:40.889 to 1:33:46 as requested by Lucy Serrano Gaston]

LS

I'm already home, today I took the day off.

AQ Lucy, what was your relationship with food when you were at University?

LS

When I was in University, I can't really tell you to tell you the truth. It's not that... I wasn't very into the kitchen. I did prepare a few things for myself, but remember that when one is studying at Colegio there is very little time left over and I also had my part time job. I also worked as a secretary for a lawyer in Mayagüez.

LS

So the time I had left was for studying. When I got home, it was for studying, I would eat, take a shower and start studying. So while it was in University, I didn't really have that much time like that to spend in the kitchen. Yes, I would prepare the basics, if I had to do it at home, with my dad. But it wasn't that I was in the kitchen all the time because I had a lot to study. And I well, I dedicated myself to studying really. I imagine the same thing to happens to you.

AQ Yes, definitively, and there are times when one does not have the time to make even the basics.

LS

Exactly, exactly, so while I was at University, like I told you, I was studying as soon as possible.

AQ

So then what? So, in this, in the preliminary interview that we did with you in I think it was in May. You had mentioned that your parents gave you money, they support you a lot at the University and they even managed to give you money for the taxi or lunch that day. Could you tell me a little about the support your parents received?

LS

I have always received support from them, always.

As I mentioned, they always focused on us and always told us, if you want to stay afloat you have to study, always. They always told us the same thing, well mom. Well, as I told you, mom had to leave- mom wanted to continue her university studies, she wanted to study social work, but she couldn't do it because she had to go to work to be able to survive and...

Well, she had her brothers in her care.

This and always, mom and dad, they told us that we have to study, study, study. I'm.. they always supported me when I started mom came... My mom- I remember like it was yesterday. The first day of, when I studied they also did the orientation week, she was there the first day that the parents [come]. And mom came that first day with me at the Coliseo [Mangual], I remember that too.

And mom: "Remember, I had to be there all day," she told me, "all day." Because they gave talks to the parents all day at that time and she stayed for all of them. [laughs] All of them the first day while I was elsewhere. Then they took them to other parts and other things and she came with me, she supported me.

Similarly, they supported me. They gave me money to pay for, at the time, it was like a public car. They gave me money for a public car. Later, I also got rides from my friend Marisa who had a car. Then, for the second year, Because I worked with the lawyers and I also worked jornal [at the University]. In the campus, I had study-work and I worked jornal. I worked jornal in the library. In the Industrial Engineering Department I also had several years working jornal.

But look, by my second year, I sold AVON products, I sold jewelry, girl. I did a little bit of everything and then this one for my birthday. [AUDIO CUTS] I had money and I had saved USD\$1,000, girl. And so for the time, now it's more, you already know. Well, now it's also good, but mom told me, but I'm going to give you an additional \$500 for a loan. [AUDIO CUTS]

That was in 1982. obviously, in mom's name, but I was responsible for paying all the debt of a Mirage Hatchback something like that. I was responsible for paying the monthly payments, do you know how much I paid for the car every month? [AUDIO CUTS] I earned at my odd jobs; from selling AVON and jewelry and I paid USD\$69 a month. It was my monthly payment, 69. And then like that, I paid my car and that's how I got my car until I graduated. They give me money, they also helped me with other things and for my food and this and that. [AUDIO CUTS]

I always had the support of them and my family.

What else can I tell you?

AQ

You said you graduated with your uncle, that you graduated from college together? I ask you; what that celebration was like?

LS

Oh, mom was very happy, girl, very happy, very happy.

Because... you know that now you choose with whom you want to walk next to. Basically you go in a line there and they want... but you go in front you go with whomever you want or in the back. You put yourself in the groups that you want. So we were in front of my uncle, I was in front and my uncle walked behind me because we were both in Business. He was from accounting.

Then it was very nice because as I tell you, well, mom was happy because the two of us graduated together. When he finished, he had a job lined up, same as me. My... the semester before... my last semester... I graduated in May of the year 1981. No. I graduated in '91.

LS

So then... that semester I had gone to an interview in the... you know that there used to be the Classified [page] in the newspaper El Nuevo Día on Sundays... that all the offers...

[interruption] On Sundays, you bought the newspaper and find all the job offers from Puerto Rico, *habidos y por hacer*.<sup>15</sup>

Then, you go into the classified pages. And as I was in my last semester I started sending resumé and sending resumé and sending resumé, by mail, obviously. And then what I did was, in one of those that I sent, they accepted me, and I went to San Juan for the interview.

It was in the Central Office of the healthcare plans for veterans. And then well, can you believe they selected me? And it was to start immediately, but since I, I only had a single class that semester, well, they selected me to start working immediately. So what I did was talk to my professor, to see if I could... It was like a class where what I had to do... it wasn't like being in the classroom [all the time], the class met on specific days only.

Then I spoke to the professor, she told me that there was no problem and then this, well, that's when I started to move and I left since February. I left back in February and started working in San Juan. I spoke with some friends of mom's and some neighbors we had in Mayagüez who had gone to, who moved to Carolina and I was living with them there; while I was working, since I already have my car, living with them there and I was working until then when I came here from my job to graduate, to parade with my uncle who also worked.

He worked as an accounting office, also in Mayagüez. So then. Well, I came to my graduation and on Monday I was back on the way to work in San Juan early in the morning, I worked on the Milla de Oro, in Hato Rey so to work, because I already had my job, you know, I was already working since February.

Then, after, a new [opportunity] came up... I had sent a few resúmenes in Mayagüez. To the Eli Lily that was Mayagüez and they called me for an interview. I went to that interview. They selected me. And then I decided to go to Colegio- to the Eli Lily in Mayagüez.

What happened? Eli Lily closes in Mayagüez [to move to] Guayama. And they offered me the chance to move to Guayama, but I said no. I didn't want to move to Guayama, like I wanted to stay in Mayagüez. I was living in San Juan for a year, a year and a half and I said: "Oh no." I already missed Mayagüez. Since then no, I don't want to leave again.

And then, that's where the request for Colegio comes from and they selected me in Colegio to this day, girl!

AQ I love knowing about this trajectory.

Lucy, do you like living in San Juan? What was that experience like?

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<sup>15</sup> *Habidos y por haber* is a Puerto Rican saying to mean everything available [exaggerated].

LS

Oh, I go to San Juan if I have to do something, if it's an emergency, if there's a procedure that I have to do. And well, I pass through, if I have to go through San Juan to other towns in the East. Oh, no, I don't like to go to Plaza [Las Américas]. No.

I ran through all of that in that year that I was there, but girl no, I don't like it. And then look at this, when I... oh, then I left, then I was there for like 3 months living with these people that are still lifelong friends of mine and um, who were my mother's neighbors, my parents' in Mayagüez, and their daughter is my friend, who grew up with me.

In fact, she tells me: "The recipe that you gave me when we were younger of the flan," she tells me, "is the one that I always make for everyone and everyone has been charmed by that flan."

Her name is Vanessa. Well with Vanesa, I spent a lot of time with her. She was there since she was little and already knew [the area]. She accompanied me to foreign places, I had a car and we go to the Justas, this and that. They used to happen in San Juan.

Oh, but I really didn't like it, so what happens when I go to live in San Juan? At that time, in Río Piedras, a wave of rapes of female students began.

Girl, and that was in all the newspapers. What was happening then, this man had not been caught, girl, he was loose around raping the those women. And that was a thing... and that would be [in the news] everyday. Every day someone came out saying they raped her, that she was taken. And that was happening in UPR-Río Piedras. I lived on Mayagüez Street, in Hato Rey, and that's very close to Río Piedras.

So, in fact, that apartment that I was renting belonged to a professor.

It belonged to the father of a professor who is still in the industrial engineering, Professor Viviana Cesaní who is the Director of Industrial Engineering, and because I worked in the department, when she found out I was movin to San Juan, her brother was finishing medicine and they had the apartment for rent because their father had bought it and then they rented it to me. I spent a good time there until I returned to Mayagüez. I liked that apartment.

Oh girl, but right behind my apartment, right in the back wall, I had a residential building [government subsidized housing]. The one that is in... I no longer remember the name... girl, and I went to bed to the sound of gunfire. It was a horriiibleee thing, and then, to make matters worse, the rapist was also loose, mom calling me to tell me to be careful, what if it's oh, no, no, no, no, no.

Also, to drive you know, one is used to driving in Mayagüez quite calmly, but there... If you're not, you have to be a cowboy on those roads and streets there.

And I can drive now, you know? But I didn't get used to it and no, no, no, no, I didn't get used to it, then

Well, I went out in Mayagüez, but it wasn't that I was in parties all the time.

You know? I was studying, And then, well, people weren't working, everyone was inviting me to parties, and it was a huge mess that they would tell me about and would say "oh no, I don't want to go there to this thing" Its like I don't have it, I wasn't used to it, I wasn't used to that, so you don't know, no, no, no, I decided...

I don't have a social life with people at work, I really didn't have one because I found them to be in a mess.

And then, every Friday without fail, I came back to Mayagüez and I left on Mondays at 4:30 in the morning because I would spend all weekend in Mayagüez. And on Mondays I went to work, because there came a time when I wasn't liking life there, well well.

Look, I'm telling you and I am sitting here squirming because no, I didn't like it.

I don't know, there's one of you from Bayamón, right?

NMBM Yes, I am from Bayamón. But I understand you, I understand you, don't worry, I understand you.

LS

But you get used to it. That's what happens, but you get used to it. But I lived my whole life in Mayagüez, you know that I- no, no. And now, if I have to go, as I tell you, it's like, the furthest I go when I am around on a trip, is like going to my uncle's house, who has now moved, who has been living for a year in Toa Alta.

And who is my uncle, but he grew up with me in my house and then I go up to there. But after that, mm-mm. Oh, no, I don't like that, going for a walk through Old San Juan..

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, that phase is already covered. I did it while I was working there, you know with my friend, with Vanessa, which was where they gave me accommodation while I got an apartment. And after I returned to Mayagüez, yes I would go on trips with my friends, we would stay in San Juan...

But its like no, now the age that I am, its like no, it's already over, I don't like that. Although I was also there when, but I didn't like it very much, you know?

I was sort of traumatized, I think.

AQ

This has made me... makes me think there will be one when it's also your turn to graduate and move out. Well, nothing, huh?

I was wondering if Lucy, you were talking about your lifelong friends? You mentioned Vanesa and Marisa, Marisa, right?

LS

Marisa.

AQ

Is there a story you want to share about them?

LS

Well, how do I tell you, with Marisa...

Well, I have shared more because she was also my classmate at Colegio in Mayagüez. We always had lunch together at noon. The offloading from the [University] and when you want to [talk], we kind of called each other to console each other, tell each other things and she was always there.

Stil to this day, since she has retired, we maintain the friendship, you know? It is a beautiful friendship, sincere, it wasn't something that I didn't...

Of course, since she already has her daughters, she had her marriage. It wasn't that I was always at her house or that I was hanging out with her, but they are friendships that you know you have there.

Well, I saw her more in the work environment, but what can I say? Whatever I needed, any relief, someone to consult something, because I know that I still have the certainty that I can count on her and it has always been that way.

And in fact, well, I also integrated her into my family, my husband knows her. Mom has known her whole life, she is crazy about mom. This, I remember that mom had her phone and mom would call her and say, "come get some *pasteles*?"

"Drop by here that I cooked for you" mom, and sometimes she would tell me, "You know, where I was today? you know where I went yesterday? and I would say "where?" "to have dinner at your mom's house," and I'm like "really?"

Mom would call her to come over, she lived near my mother's house, my father's house.

Mom would call her: "come through here, I have food" "come get this" and she would visit my parents.

Then Vanessa, as I told you, she was already in San Juan. And now her son studies at Colegio in Mayagüez.

I remember that when he came as a freshman, he appeared by my office. I said: "Oh look-" I forgot the name... Fernando, "Fernando is here!" and Fernando quickly that first year, what he did while he got was used to it, he did not leave my office. Now, I hardly see him because he is in electrical engineering and he is staying. He is, in fact, staying, he lives in the house, in the

house that they grew up in... In the house where Vanesa lived, who was my neighbor. What happens is that my parents do not live in that neighborhood; where I told you that is next to the José de Diego, where I grew up in Las Piedras street.

The boy studies at Colegio and lives in that house because they always kept that house. And he lives there alone while he studies and goes away on weekends to San Juan. You know? The house is still there and he is the one who lives there now.

With her, well by phone, that mostly by phone, by Facebook and those things is how we maintain more the communication. Because, as I tell you, well she lives, she has her life in San Juan. But we always make a space to communicate with each other.

AQ

I love it. Thank you very much for sharing these things with us Lucy. And I don't know if you can think of anything else that you want to share...?

LS No.

AQ Something that?

LS

You ask me a question and then you have to hit me three times to get me to stop because I keep talking. I keep talking, talking and talking.

I hope that what I telling you helps... that it serves the project.

AQ Yes, everything is fantastic. If I'm not mistaken, Natalia has a doctor's appointment now I don't know if we want to close the interview.

LS

Yes I do have to go. The boy was calling me because he started working on the yard. I have... in fact, I told my mother that I was going to go to her house for a moment and she told me to come in, I'm going to eat.

AQ

Oh perfect everyone, we have to have lunch.

LS

At home everything always happens with food.

AQ I love it.

So it is and thank you very much for sharing with us here and sharing your life story. And if we are going to be writing to you, if nothing else, I am going to be writing to you because we are interested in a possible second interview.

LS

Yes, all the things, all the times that you are communicating with me, you can do it with me, there is no problem.

AQ

So I don't know if this would be something that interests you, but maybe we can interview you and your mother.

LS

Well look, I've only said this to her, she almost never says no, I just have to say when, but we coordinate then so that it's at home and I go to her house and we're done. We are there with her because she is not very social, although she has Facebook. But no, you know, they're not up to date with this virtual conference thing and stuff.

AQ

Okay, we can coordinate that then that second meeting seems fantastic to me.

LS

Yes. Well nothing, girl, as always, right, um.

NMBM In what?

LS Tell me.

NMBM No, I just wanted to thank you, for being here with us and for allowing us to interview you.

LS Gosh thanks, thanks to you, truly [cuts off]

AQ Yes, I really thank you very much. Really, everything has been Oh, very good and if something like this arises, maybe I will write to you by email to know something extra, but really everything has been fantastic.