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Oral history interview with Sofía Pérez Alers, April 2, 2022

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ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

Oral History Interview with Sofia Perez Alers

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Sofia Perez Alers conducted by Derek on April 2, 2022. This interview is part of course work 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.

Interviewer: Derek

Interviewee: Sofia Perez Alers

April 2, 2022

Calle Pedro Roldan Blanco, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico

INGL 3238-003D

Interview transcript:

00:00

Derek: Okay, your name, age, where did you live, where were you raised, everything.

00:07

Sofia: okay, my name is Sofia Perez Alers, I was born in a quarter called Arenales Altos in Isabela. There I lives until I was 16...

(muffled noise)

When I was 16 we moved to Aguadilla where I finished high school, then I fell in love and got married and went to live to Victoria in Aguadilla. From there I worked and lived.

00:49

Derek: Where did you work?

Sofia: I worked, I worked a lot of jobs, I worked with Lcdo. Sanchez then I worked with the Department of Cruz of housing, then I worked at at the store that no longer exists “Velajej” and the pharmacy of Ferrari as a cashier.

01:10

Derek: oh ok, how old are you right now?

Sofia: Well I was born a 30 of April of 1938

Derek: oh nice, this month?

Sofia: the day 30 of April I will be 84 years of age, I was born in your month

(light laughter)

01:28

Derek: umm, we came to also talk about your experience with Maria, you have already told me that it was a tragedy in your house, if you wouldn't mind speaking on the subject...

Sofia: I don't mind...

Derek: ...Ok, well if you could explain your experience in the most detailed way, did you pass Maria in that house? No, you passed it here right?

(by here the house we were taking the interview in)

Sofia: yes

Derek: And this address is?

Sofia: here? “Sector Richard”

Derek: And when you passed Maria here it was all tranquil, nothing much happened right?

Sofia: thanks to God nothing, but in la Victoria that was my house, that house was where I got married , it was a project that “La cruz” of low income, there the water rose to 6 feet inside the house.

Derek: almost to the ceiling?

Sofia: taller than me

(light laughter)

Sofia: well, there I lost everything, Maria needed everything that was in the house apparently and took it (laughs)

02:37

Derek: And when you entered the house for the first time after, how did you feel?

Sofia: I didn't feel much emotion, the one who got emotional was Lupe that cried.(laughs)

(Lupe is Sofia's daughter)

Derek: so you were at peace?

Sofia: well, I looked for people to help me clean it and move the little that was left.

(inaudible conversation)

03:14

Derek: so right now the house in Victoria, you no longer live there?

Sofia: No, since I got married to a man that had 3 children, when he died, the kids didn't want me to go on staying over there, and we did the dividend of inheritance and Lupe bought their brothers parts, so now the house is Lupe's.

03:39

Derek: And so I ask you, what do your kids do?

Sofia: well Lupe is a nurse, Sol Luis studied "administracion empresas" works with LUMA now, and Lupe, works in the industrial hospital and is making her masters degree in nursery, and that's why shes studying over there.

(Lupe was in the room next to the one in the interview)

04:13

Derek: And the house when you first saw it from outside did you see any noticeable damage?

Sofia: well, the house is um concrete, its not bricks, well it how do you say...

Derek: the walls caved?

Sofia: no, no, the house didn't suffer any physical damage in the um structure, the structure didn't suffer any damage, only in the roof, that well you know FEMA was it, helped.

Derek: and did your neighbors suffer the same damages?

Sofia: They suffered the same damages all of us, in front of me well theres one to three houses empty, because the people well died.

Derek: Yes? This is because everybody who lived there was...

Sofia: elderly, elderly, the people who lived there went and got took to retirement houses, and the house is closed over there.

Derek: And well, I ask you, when Maria happened all the help that was given was the community or FEMA or...

Sofia: FEMA helped me in putting the doors, because the doors were all broken, the indoor doors they put them and they sealed my ceiling.

05:45

Derek: And about how much time did it take for FEMA to come help or did you have to go get the help?

Sofia: No, we have to go request these helps... there was a person who came through over there and interviewed me, but we had to go to the office to sign papers and stuff.

Derek: and about how long was the procedure with FEMA.

Sofia: No with that they were pretty quick to come, didn't have any problems?

Derek: and did you know anybody who had problems with this.

Sofia: Well, the people always complain (light laughter)

Derek: well yes, but your neighbor or anything, you were all given the same help?

Sofia: except the one in front of my house. Since hes not the real owner of the house.

06:41

Derek: ok, Im gonna ask a few personal questions, if that's alright?

Sofia: mhm

Derek: What was your favorite thing about that house?

Sofia: the thing I liked the most? Well if im sincere the thing I like most about any house and that house, is the kitchen and theyre garden.

(light laughter)

(inaudible)

Derek: And did you have a big garden like the one you have here over in that house?

Sofia: No, it was little little.

Derek: yes? And even then you still had your plants and everything in there.

Sofia: I had a garden, had a garden of plantain and banana.

Derek: and was the house a two story?

Sofia: No, it was one story, it was living room kitchen, 3 bedrooms and the bathroom.

Derek: well, then, ok, and, umm, I think, and when Maria happened here, did you feel frustrated or did you think anytime about your house in Victoria?

Sofia: I didn't suffer anything, we opened that window, and we started looking at the wind, and then I experimented in what they call the empty hole, umm...

Derek: The eye?

Sofia: the eye yes, when the eye of the hurricane happened, even I went down and then came back.

Derek: Yes, yes I too investigated at the time in the eye.

(light laughter between both)

08:12

Derek: umm and, the house in Victoria, you say you now don't have it.

Sofia: no I don't have a house (laughs)

Derek: and when you lived there with your kids and everything how was it?

Sofia: I lived there well since I was 23, when I got married, I lived about 20, 22 years. I got married a 7 of April.

(light laughter)

09:17

Derek: umm I had another question, umm, have you ever heard of the humanities action lab or HAL?

Sofia: no, I don't even know what that is.

(light explanation of HAL)

Derek; and after the hurricane how long was it before you could go back to your house?

Sofia: we went back the next day right Lupe? We went to see the flood (laughs)

Derek: how much time do you guys think ti was flooded, before you guys could pass?

Sofia: the second day we could go and pass to the house.

Derek: did you think about the house at any moment during maria?

Sofia: no, (laughs) I was enjoying the breeze, and it was the firs time ive seen a hurricane.

10:36

Derek: And umm I ask you, now that you mention that, did you ever experience a hurricane or a storm in that house?

Sofia: no, floods, yes.

Derek: and how were the floods in that house?

Sofia: Once it came up, but it mostly just dirtied the floor, it came up to the windows.

11:23

Derek: and all that was lost FEMA or...

Sofia: no..

Derek: nothing right they didn't pay you or give you anything right?

Sofia: no, they h=only gave me the help with the doors and the bathroom, the ceiling, they gave me a , that little stove that's right there. A little electric stove.

(laughs)

(little story about where she lived and how she got to live in that house)

13:11

Derek: well I think that's everything.

(light laughter)

Derek: lastly, its ok if I share this experience with my peers and the professor.

Sofia: of course, and I would like to add, that everything in life comes so we can learn, we learn to live with hard circumstances and we learn to live with easier ones.

14:19

End of interview