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ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

Oral History Interview with Christopher Mena Lantigua

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Christopher Mena Lantigua conducted by Jonathan Mena Lantigua on May 9, 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.

Jonathan Mena: [00:00:00]

Greetings, my name is Jonathan Mena. We are here in San Juan in the San Gerardo gated community. We are in my room right now; it's 10:14 pm on May 9, 2022. This will be the formal interview with Christopher Mena Lantigua, who will be my interviewee. This interview is part of the English 3338 course. Well, first of all. What's your name?

Christopher Mena: [00:00:44]

Greetings to all. My name is Christopher Mena Lantigua. It's a pleasure that you can listen to me tonight.

Jonathan Mena: [00:00:51]

The pleasure is mine, Christopher. First, I would like to thank you for being here. I know it's late at night, which was planned for a long time, so I hope I can get out of this soon without much hassle. Let's first establish a base. Please tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

Christopher Mena: [00:01:14]

I was born in the town of Bayamón. Specifically, in the "Hospitál Regional de Bayamón". I was also raised in Toa Baja-Bayamón because the house is located in Toa Baja, but my upbringing, which is school and everything else, was in Bayamón.

Jonathan Mena: [00:01:33]

Ok in Bayamón, Toa Baja. Perfect. Where are you currently living?

Christopher Mena: [00:01:39]

I am currently living in San Juan, specifically in Cupey.

Jonathan Mena: [00:01:44]

Ok. First of all, how do you feel? How are you feeling tonight? Are you tired? I know you work late and work quite a few hours a day. What do you think? Tell me.

Christopher Mena: [00:01:55]

Well, I feel good. At this stage of our lives, at the age of 31, I believe that it is time to produce. Invariably I have to work through the situation to keep going whether I'm tired. For the privilege at another given point in my life, not to have this "trajín," as we say in good Spanish.

Jonathan Mena: [00:02:19]

Perfect, so look, I wanted to ask you a bit since we are in these difficult times of COVID and all these transmitted diseases. How do you feel? Have you gotten sick with COVID? Have you had a family member who got sick? Do you know someone who has gotten sick? That may have suffered death or something. Tell me.

Christopher Mena: [00:02:49]

Yes, I genuinely believe that this pandemic has been located in a time in our lives that, in one way or another, it has had a social, mental, and physical impact, among other variables. I know many people who have been infected. I know people that died, too, not close to me, but I know them. Currently, and as far as I know, I have not been infected, but I have had a lot of exposure to infected people, so it's been a bit difficult. To put it another way, how do you deal with the scenario that you may be infected without knowing it or who else you will infect. Because my concern is not so much myself because I know that I'm in good health, it's both of my parents. My mother and father are alive and older than 60 years, and that is where we are going in this interview.

Jonathan Mena: [00:03:51]

Right. I'm glad you brought up where we're going then. We can move around a bit as we've introduced ourselves and laid an essential foundation. First of all, tell me, what do you do for work? What is your job currently?

Christopher Mena: [00:04:15]

Currently, I work with the Education Department. I work in the Special Education department, particularly at the central offices. Although my exposure is of another nature, I have an administrative job as I have other academic preparation.

Jonathan Mena: [00:04:38]

Ok. How long have you been doing this type of job in the department?

Christopher Mena: [00:04:45]

I have been working with the Department of Education for approximately seven years. I started as a consultant for the education department for the "Secretaría Asociada de Educación Especial". And now, I am a regular employee of the government of Puerto Rico in that same area.

Jonathan Mena: [00:05:05]

Wow, seven years! You have a lot of experience in the education department. So, first of all, what would you like to bring? What do you particularly want to talk to me about today? What is the most crucial issue that you feel we need to amplify the voice of?

Christopher Mena: [00:05:46]

Well, look, I think it is very peculiar and unfortunate that it is not a topic that is brought up a lot or brought up in conversations or other forums, particularly, social forums, this concept and the variants of what is population aging. This population pyramid is inverted through the years. As well as, how it is linked to poverty and the lack of certain types of access that these people of 60 years or more have to be able to get by. For example: going to an appointment, getting medicine, treating some diseases, etcetera.

Jonathan Mena: [00:06:31]

Ok. You're telling me about some access for elderly people and so on. First of all, you tell me 60 and up. Why do say 60 and older particularly, it's the population that we're looking at right now?

Christopher Mena: [00:07:01]

Well, as established in what is the policy of Puerto Rico, particularly as a Commonwealth, elderly people are considered 60 years of age or older and as a result, they are given access to some benefits or what is called benefit. In particular, I bring up age because in some territories it is considered 65 years or older and in some other territories it is considered 60 years or older. To put it in perspective, currently, people don't retire at 60 or 55 as it was at a given moment. Now people are retiring at 65-66 years. In other words, the productivity of these elderly people is lengthened by the process that perhaps they do not have an economic benefit that can sustain them within the retirement process and that is why they have to extend themselves even a little more.

Jonathan Mena: [00:08:10]

Ok, just now when you mentioned benefits, you did it with a little sarcastic accent. Can you explain to me why you consider the benefits not necessarily what they're called and what is the connotation that you wanted to bring?

Christopher Mena: [00:08:37]

First, well, I want to bring up that, yes, it was in a sarcastic tone because we tend to think that the benefits that elderly people enjoy, such as, for example, that some elderly person who worked all their life for a small company, that being it cleaning, telecommunications, whatever it is, could work all their life to receive Social Security. It's true that due to the little money that there is already in Social Security left, these people earn \$150-\$200 a month when in reality they have to pay for the electricity cost of their house, which is probably \$250. Their water is maybe \$150. Some medications are not necessarily covered by your health plan and if you have a health plan.

Jonathan Mena: [00:09:30]

Ok. Can you tell me and expand a little more on what specifically are the accesses that are lacking in elderly people? What types of access do you think are not being given or not being helped that older people need right now?

Christopher Mena: [00:10:01]

I would say that I think it is rather the scope, for example, I can tell you the medical plans. An elderly person, a person who reaches a certain age, to perhaps get a medical plan, has to access an office, has to fill out documentation. We are in a process of digitization, that is, a technological process, and we are asking these people to, for example: have to enter a platform to upload a PDF document, when, in reality, these people are not familiar with what technology is, but it is required

for that type of access. We ask that in order to make an appointment you have to call, for example, 72 hours in advance, to perhaps a family member that they do not necessarily possess. And if they have the benefit of transporting to an appointment it's only probably on a particular day and on hour, they can't because they have to get other things. Another type of access that we can expand within this process is non-economic access, which can also be related to the care of these people. These people are not necessarily destined to have care or can pay for care. At 60 years of age, with the job I currently have, I can pay \$1,000, and \$2,000 for care. When I get to \$200. That is something that we have to consider within the corrective actions or within the plan to follow or that the government has to work so that this population benefits at some point or another because Puerto Rico is a Puerto Rico with gray hair. Is a Puerto Rico invested in the population pyramids and we have to go out into the streets to identify, what are the resources? What are the laws? What law shelters these of these advanced beings?

Jonathan Mena: [00:11:57]

That was very interesting about the inverted pyramid. When you say inverted pyramid, what do you mean?

Christopher Mena: [00:12:0]

Well, I mean basically it's directional. There are the 60-plus-year-olds, which refers more to as the "baby boomers"; they are still alive and the birth rate, of the people who are being born, is few. Before, baby boomers had about 10 children, and right now those 10 children are the only ones that can procreate, but of those 10, 3 are the ones having children. The remaining 7 do not want to have children, they want to have a puppy, or they want to have another type of family that is not necessarily the nuclear one that we are accustomed to, or the extended nuclear one that Baby Boomers were having. And we can't ignore the fact that the young are the ones who are dying. Because they are the ones who are more exposed and have more fatalities than the elderly people themselves. Because an elderly person can reach up to 90-100 years old and yet, perhaps a younger person cannot because he is selling drugs and dies at 22 years old. And that person could've had a son that follows his footsteps, and this is how this inverted population pyramid is created.

Jonathan Mena: [00:13:27]

That makes a lot of sense as the murders today are basically out of control. The murder rate in Puerto Rico.

Christopher Mena: [00:13:43]

Right.

Jonathan Mena: [00:13:45]

So, what do you think the government should do about these people? Tell me some alternatives that you think the government should create, today, right now, that can be an extra help? Maybe extend the aid they have now. Possibly they have some help, but it's not enough. Tell me a little about the help elderly folk have now and how you would like to improve it, if any, or create new ones?

Christopher Mena: [00:14:16]

Well, I think we have to start by analyzing the concept of aging from many perspectives to assess what these elderly people require. I believe that an extensive analysis must be done, but the proposals that the government should be instigated to propose are the creation of laws or at least bills, that shelter the elderly. For example, there is a law, I believe it's the 171 law for the empowerment of elderly people, which is called Prospera Law. If I make a mistake with the law I can look it up later and share them. This law, for example, identifies that the children of these elderly people or their direct descendants, have to take care of the elderly family members. What this program does is intervene so that those 10 children can support, in some way or another, this elderly person, with economic and non-economic resources. As an example, our parents are over 60 years old. My brother and I should take care of them. My brother who has more money could provide the bulk of that economic budget and I can take them to appointments or buy them medicines because they are non-economic contributions. However, this law identifies that if I don't feel like taking the charge, I don't have to assume it. There is no charge. It is not punitive. If the program simply contacts me, I can say no, and the matter is closed. That file is closed. There are no consequences for the provider to not resort to their feeder. And that is one of the great disadvantages that older populations have. The other one that I can identify is health plans...

Jonathan Mena: [00:16:37]

Let me interrupt you for a second, so one of the things that you would swiftly change is to make it a punitive law so that it basically forces the children to support them and it sounds kind of weird to force, but obviously, they already took care of you for how many years when you were small and needed it, so it's not too much to ask in my opinion. So, do you think that one of the first things that you would create is to put some punitive action in this law?

Christopher Mena: [00:17:15]

Yes, to strengthen elderly people because the reality is that, if I don't have a legal obligation, then I'm not going to do it. Because it's just, well I am not going to say Puerto Ricans, human beings are like that. Humans have to have to be compelled and we see it throughout our lives. If humans are not forced to do some things, for whatever particular reason, it will not be done. Because we probably don't have that desire or more than that, that necessity to be forced to do it, and it's clear. I have a particular case in mind, which was one of those that marked me. The law and this is very particular and makes me laugh, the law has some defenses. It is true that some people are exempt from the program, for example, people who were raped, mistreated, physically abused, and otherwise.

Jonathan Mena: [00:18:16]

From all ages, right? We aren't talking about any age elderly people right now.

Christopher Mena: [00:18:19]

Yes, I mean these children who are going to be affected by the law, well they are excluded, and they were mistreated, raped and more, and when I called one day... OH one detail, I'm not mentioning this program of the law because I think it's bad. I think it is a very nice project, but it has to be extended for it to prosper. It has to move towards the most punitive it can be for people to cope. In the same way, as ASUME makes parents, whether it be the mother or father, pay a pension to their children, we have to force the children to also pay a pension to those parents, who perhaps do not have those resources to be able to support themselves.

Jonathan Mena: [00:19:10]

That's another thing that you would do, particularly if you, for example, were a legislator or something like that. Create a law that makes it possible for these children to pay a pension in cases where it is necessary for the parents that can't sustain themselves, that the children need to at least pay a pension close to how the children...

Christopher Mena: [00:19:38]

And make it be like ASSUME. Make it based on what the person earns. And if the person doesn't earn much because we also have people, families, that are very poor and that they don't have enough for themselves, but at the very least they should do something with their parents. They should have an obligation to take care of their parents. That is what I want to do. That is what I want to get to. Unfortunately, governments are not prepared to assume these physical and emotional consequences and all this bewilderment of the elderly population.

Jonathan Mena: [00:20:17]

Ok, since you brought up the types of consequences. What is the biggest concern when it comes to the advanced population? What does the lack of access, the lack of care, the lack of financial aid create for them? Specifically, what happens to elderly people who don't have cars, that don't have access. What happens to them?

Christopher Mena: [00:20:50]

Basically, it revolves around economic access. Lack of economical access leaves them stuck. We have to see how we can reach this elderly population, without them having to incur so much expense. Because for them it may not be feasible. They're in need. They are in need. I think a lot about the old people of the Playita community over there in Santurce. I can't imagine that they can reach their doctors for appointments or that the children can support them. How do we reach that population? How do we go and fulfill the needs of that population if we don't know why they are marginalized in the first place? Because the poor in Puerto Rico will always be poor and Puerto Rico is a poor place, a poor archipelago. We need to surpass that perspective that we cannot maintain this population and we do not have the access to do so. What are we going to do? Where are we going to turn?

Jonathan Mena: [00:21:59]

I ask you then, Christopher, you have told me a lot about the laws and society and how the law should fall on these people who need help. So, is there no help from relatives? Many relatives abandon their elderly family members, is what you are telling me?

Christopher Mena: [00:22:26]

Yes! Yes.

Jonathan Mena: [00:22:26]

Is that prevalent?

Christopher Mena: [00:22:28]

Yes. Abandonment at old age? “Ay bendito” it’s extremely prevalent. In Puerto Rico that happens a lot. Look, I know about one particular case. I want to talk about this case because it was something very, very strong for me. In the gated community where we live, six or seven years ago, I saw this elderly person, he was about 70 years old. I saw him lying on his lawn, cutting the grass with his hands, and living in subhuman infrastructure. You couldn’t. He couldn’t. The smell was hell. A very dire situation. And well, I responsibly contacted the authorities at the time so that they in turn contacted the “Departamento de la Familia” to locate these children and intervene. Later on, I found out, or rather the summary that they gave me of the case because I had a contact in the Department at that time., was that he simply lives alone because his children left him alone and he’s just there. When they called the children, they did not want to take care of him. So, what happened to this old man? They found him dead. How? Because of the smell. As that is the reality of Puerto Rico today. If we take a tour of something as simple as this gated community in San Juan, we will see that there are many many houses that are abandoned. Why? Because the children of these elderly people never took care of these people, and those houses are abandoned because nobody wants to take care of the house either. Right now, we have an abandoned house next door that is totally wasted and abandoned because there were two elderly people with mental problems that were neglected. The woman had multiple personalities and the other person, who I understand also died recently, had schizophrenia. Who takes care of these people? Who was taking them on appointments? And I saw that person with a leg that was almost gangrenous. And nobody, no one assumed responsibility. He also had many animals. Many dogs and cats. Because in one way or another, people reward their mental health and since they didn’t have children, they probably used their pets for that purpose. They were also left and abandoned. That is, not only was there elderly abuse and abandonment, probably institutional, but there was also animal abuse. We are seeing that there are so many different perspectives in these cases and that nobody intervenes because nobody cares yet. Until it explodes it won’t matter. Because we are a society that reacts only when things explode in our faces.

Jonathan Mena: [00:25:52]

Ok. So, let's talk. I was reading the other day that the percentage of poverty in Puerto Rico is around 45, possibly 40%. How can such a large number of people be below the resources? How does that affect access for the elderly? Is it possible these relatives cannot take care of themselves, so they feel that they cannot or shouldn't have to take care of their parents if they can't even take proper care of themselves? How do you think that the poverty that is seen right now in Puerto Rico, almost 40%, affects parents, the elderly, basically everything you know?

Christopher Mena: [00:26:43]

It affects the entire population. The reality of the case is that as I said a while ago, and as you rightly mentioned, half of the population is poor. We know that the Puerto Rican population is poor. So how do we handle the issue of access? First of all, you do not necessarily have to contribute financially. You don't have to spend \$200 on your father or your grandmother, you don't have to spend that much money, but you must offer another type of familial support. It may very well be that elderly people just want to give or be hugged. What they want, perhaps, is to be with you. You don't necessarily have to give money because those elderly people, like baby boomers, were basically raised on the bare minimum. And right now, in their last stage of life, as we call them in this aging process, the only thing they want is to be accompanied. It is enjoying the little

that they have left of their lives with the people who were close to them. So, what I believe is that people also have to help in some way or another, not necessarily financially, but to contribute in some other way. The government also has to help in some way. I'm not going to say that they have to eradicate poverty in one day, but we have to include in our perspective that the economy, the population in general, has to increase its productivity. Jobs need to be improved. We have to improve what Social Security is. Life insurance needs to be improved. You have to work with health plans. That the medical plans only earn them.

Jonathan Mena: [00:28:39]

Since you are talking about medical plans and basically the mental state of society, I would also like to bring up a point that I feel is very important, as you said earlier, this is an inverted pyramid where the elderly are the ones who are basically in higher numbers or in larger concentrations, so they don't have the access that they need, but on the other hand, they're basically the vast majority of the voting population of the island. And many of them, as we know, tend to be affiliated with let's just say PNP, to say whatever. Do you think that this should also include some type of re-education? Because Puerto Rico is very tribal. We are very conservative here on the island. It is very difficult to change someone's perspective, but when we are at these extremes, for example, you think that possibly re-educating these elderly people to really see politics as something more than just a simple game of who wins and who loses, and more who's willing to help you. How do you think we can reach that population with the message that no matter what party, no matter what, what we need is a better Puerto Rico and you obviously benefit too. How would you reach those people?

Christopher Mena: [00:30:28]

Well, look, the reality of the case is that re-education of elderly people is very complicated because they already have a mental rigidity that leads them to tradition. We are slaves to tradition and that is why Puerto Rican society is the way it is. I believe that, in one way or another, instead of asking politicians for help, we should remove these people from the government by any means necessary, as was done with Ricky Roselló. We have to somehow ingrain in elderly people that the last name or a political party color is not going to provide them that certainty of comfort that they so desperately ask for. If, for example, we have a person like Lúgaro to set an example of a political party, although we are not going to get too much into politics, is a person who brings a new perspective. A different perspective sure, but not necessarily attractive for these elderly people. The elderly needs to know that they can be cared for and in the politicians' promises. Considering that inverted population pyramid, we did not see promises for the elderly. We saw lots of promised benefits for young people. So first we have to re-educate politicians to see where the population pyramid is, and then we tell the elderly: Hey, what Benito's son is bringing you is curious but in turn powerful and will help with our care.

Jonathan Mena: [00:32:30]

I like it. I like the idea that reeducation comes from both sides. From politicians where movements have to solidify and win more people to possibly get to those numbers that we need and see a change because it is clear that we are not getting it with what we have. Anyways, let's get back to other topics. Let's talk about how Puerto Rico has suffered many incidents lately. We have had the two most famous hurricanes in recent history, Irma and Maria. We were without electricity for several months. How does that kind of problem affect the elderly? Is the elderly affected more?

Are they less affected? Does help come first for them? How have these types of problems affected the elderly, particularly?

Christopher Mena: [00:33:59]

Invariably, it affects them in every way, even if a natural disaster does not occur, but in one way or another, it affects them more than everything. For example, you and I are 31, and 32 years old. We can go to Crespo Ice Plant and stand in line for 2 hours, but I don't think that our father who is in his sixties, almost seventies, can or should stand in line for hours for a bag of ice. The ice is for some cold water, because his house is without electricity, and everything that was in the fridge is spoiled. We can buy a generator and connect it to the house and that's it. They take out their savings and buy a little plant, but who connects it? Who goes and says: Ahh Don't worry Pepo, I'll connect it so that you have at least a fan in the room? And who provides maintenance? It is a very bleak picture. I remember one time in our hometown in Toa Baja. Toa Baja was one of the areas that were most affected by these hurricanes. We saw that many old people in Toa Baja were alone and that they probably died of drowning or died basically because they couldn't get to the hospital because the pump they used or the injection they needed for insulin wasn't available. I mean, these elderly people, that's why they need extra care because they probably can't do what we can do now. That's why I say that our age of production is now, but when that time comes, who is going to take care of us? Who!? Who bears the responsibility? Because it's not that they don't want to, it's that they can't.

Jonathan Mena: [00:36:16]

Okay. We already talked about this a little bit. Still, I would like you to touch a little more on, not necessarily the most significant risk that we have with this situation because obviously, that is death, but one of the more minor risks that these elderly people tend to suffer as a result of all this lack of access and basically lack someone to take care of them and attend to them.

Christopher Mena: [00:36:54]

Diseases. Mental illnesses such as Alzheimer's. Who can take care of a person with Alzheimer's? A person with Alzheimer's cannot be cared for by just anyone. You have to have a nurse. You have to have skilled and trained people to do this type of care. Who can take care of them? You're not going to listen to a 32-year-old with Alzheimer's. It may be the case because I haven't heard much about it, but you can. When these chronic diseases, which come from aging start showing up, it starts to get complicated. At 63-64, the ailments begin these chronic diseases. These mental illnesses are aggressive. And there are not enough resources or access to take care of them. I have a co-worker whose mother recently died of Alzheimer's. She didn't have enough money to take her to treatments. To be cared for by a nurse. To remove her ulcers. She could not and did not know what to do. She had to learn, but she wasn't at all skilled in being able to do that, so her time was cut short. All because she didn't have the access that a person with this serious mental illness needed to be able to support him.

Jonathan Mena: [00:38:35]

Well in that case it wasn't so much about access, you told me, obviously it's not the fault of the daughter if she is able and willing to take her to those appointments and in that case would be more likely a medical insurance issue, which I understand that you talked a little about health insurance.

Christopher Mena: [00:38:52]

Yes!

Jonathan Mena: [00:38:53]

How are health insurance companies, in Puerto Rico, protagonists in these issues? How are companies...

Christopher Mena: [00:39:14]

They profit.

Jonathan Mena: [00:39:15]

Do they profit?

Christopher Mena: [00:39:17]

Well, these companies or organizations, as we know, are also capitalists, so they will invariably win. And they have certain types of coverage that, yes, benefit, in one way or another, these elderly patients, but perhaps they have to have a kind of economy, of money, to be able to sustain themselves. For example, if we talk about medications, they may tell you: "Look, you need ten pills, but your plan only covers three. You are on the hook for the other seven, and the deductible for those seven is \$275? Do you think they only need three pills? They need all 10! Where are they going to get \$275? From the pension that is \$100, \$200? They can't pay for it. Then probably in three days, they will spend the retirement they earned of \$150 from a lifetime of employment. And the children probably won't have enough to support the rest of that \$275.

Jonathan Mena: [00:40:43]

Can you mention some methodologies that we can do to keep these elderly people active?

Christopher Mena: [00:40:56]

Well, look, I think this can be worked on at the level of Senate projects, like bills. Since we have this population, we have to keep it active in some way or another to learn perhaps to limit, or I don't want to say limit, but possibly reduce mental illnesses, sedentary lifestyle, and the like. Politicians can and should create active recreation camps in public places within these municipalities. For example, 50-60% of the elderly population tend to be at "La Placita de Santurce," or you see them in "Plaza Las Américas." We must go to these places, like Playita and Shanghai, and reach these people. We need to go to their house or the "Placita de Santurce" and have a domino tournament. Do some yoga. Do aerobics. It is a matter of keeping them in some way or another active and, in turn, including their family members. May they be the sustainable support these people need. In one way or another, the family support that we can get through these bills will benefit the livelihood of these older people. Because in one way or another, we have to understand the tools for this aging process affecting all areas of the human being: psychological, mental, physical, and even health.

Jonathan Mena: [00:43:00]

Ok. What is your projection with this social problem in 10 or 20 years as things move right now? That is, not including that there are advances or decreases, basically that things move at the

same pace as we are going. How do you see this social problem in 5, 10, 20, or maybe more years in the future? How do you see the panorama?

Christopher Mena: [00:43:33]

Well, I see more poverty. Less welfare for these people because we don't have the resources. We won't be able to maintain all these people. Right now, they don't do it; they don't want to, nor can they; in 20 years, as things are going and as the government is not helping, because that is the word. It is not helping these types of people. We're currently living in a gray-haired Puerto Rico. In 20 years, we will have the tribal Puerto Rico that has no path forward. We will be a Republic that has no way to support anyone, and that scarcity of resources will leave us, in one way or another, unable to sustain these elderly people. And I include myself because, by that time, I will most likely be an elderly person myself.

Jonathan Mena: [00:44:42]

Hey, but at least we're going to be a Republic. There is something good in that, then. Anyways so. So you honestly believe that this is going from bad to worse? You don't see this getting better unless there's some dramatic change? Unless something happens to wake us up. An emergency is what you're saying.

Christopher Mena: [00:45:14]

Totally! Totally. Like I said earlier, until this blows up in our faces, as everything else does, nothing will change. When it blows up and it will, we will have two people working and 65 to support, that the government of Puerto Rico is going to say what we are going to do with this. And it's going to be so late, that all these people are going to die and none of us will be able to support them. And these two people who are left alive are going to be so overloaded that they also suffer the same fate. Because the overload of the elderly also creates an unknown factor in poor people.

Jonathan Mena: [00:46:11]

Hey, and thinking about that and the topic of the inverted pyramid, you brought the diaspora to mind. We are seeing that much of the able-bodied and young population of Puerto Rico is going in most frequency to the United States, but also to Europe and many other parts of the world and so they are basically letting Puerto Rico get older. These people are not helping because in their case, they can possibly send the money, but who is the one that helps their parents to possibly go to the appointment and so on. So, the diaspora is also a gigantic problem in terms of these access problems because then the problem becomes worse.

Christopher Mena: [00:47:08]

Yes, it increases, one way or another. That is why this way of thinking, this analysis of the elderly, must be a multidirectional and multifactorial analysis. That's why we can't analyze it from a small perspective or from one perspective. This is a problem that is affecting us all. It is going to affect us all and I don't see much movement, not from relatives, nor do I see government movements in favor of these elderly people. Right now there is an office for these people called "Procuraduría de las Personas de Edad Avanzada" that I am still trying to decipher, what they are going to procure.

Jonathan Mena: [00:47:58]

Okay. I understand that we have already talked a lot. I would like to move to something positive, although I don't think there is much there, we are going to try to find something. Do you know any organization, for example, for-profit or non-profit, that possibly protects or defends their rights? Or is there simply not even a social movement that can be seen in favor of this access or these benefits for the elderly? Do we need a complete re-education or are there people willing to help and create another perspective, another situation?

Christopher Mena: [00:48:58]

Well, recently, not recently, but a while ago I learned about this organization, CONCRA, which is a non-profit organization that educates and helps homosexuals who are 60 years old or older and have these diseases, such as AIDS and HIV, which they obviously contracted at some point in their lives and help them in this care process. They're located and looked after while they try to locate their relatives. They give them their medicine; they take them to the places where they need to be. What they do is that they take them out of the place where they are and they take them to do different activities, both physical and mental. And in one way or another, that gives me hope that yes, although it's in this particular population, which has to meet certain criteria that are very inclusive, there is a movement towards something better hopefully. And I believe that, for example, these types of non-profit organizations, without government help, fall. There comes a point when they need so much money that they cannot assume this great responsibility, but in some way or another, through different funds that exist or that can be created, they can manifest themselves in some way or another so that these people are cared for, remembered, and that in some way or another are sustained within these processes.

Jonathan Mena: [00:50:43]

Hey, what you said is very interesting about gay elderly people because clearly, the populations at risk are going to be worse off if they are elderly, right? In many cases, I suppose that these elderly people were not even approved by society at that time, so many possibly have not had access for a long time and it is good to see that there are organizations that are dedicating themselves specifically to the people who need it most. Because the elderly need help, but the marginalized of the elderly. The marginalized of the marginalized, well obviously they need all the help they can get and that's good to know.

Christopher Mena: [00:51:33]

And it's not necessarily that they don't have children or dependents, they do, it's that those same children judge in one way or another the sexuality of their parents or grandparents, simply because they don't want to accept them. And although people believe that we are in an open society and that homosexuality is now accepted in some way or another, it is not. And not only homosexuality but all social differences. Puerto Ricans are an archaic society. It is a limited society and is governed by essentially the Catholic religion. And we are not going to touch on the subject of religion because that is not an issue here, but in one way or another, we need to remove our blinders about what society is. We do not analyze society from a broad enough perspective,

that is why we are always going in the same and rushed direction. It is not a healthy direction. It is a complete run-over.

Jonathan Mena: [00:52:44]

Okay. Well, I think it's already been enough. We've been here 59 minutes. We have talked about many things. This has been very interesting. Before finishing I would like to ask you if you had any last words that you would like to say about this. How do you expect this is going to look in the future? how should it look? How do you feel about it? I know that you have a strong opinion because of your employment and what you have witnessed but tell me a little about how you feel. How can we fix this? What do you see for the future? Etc.

Christopher Mena: [00:53:34]

The reality of the case is that aging, in one way or another, is understood to be a phenomenon, as I said, multidimensional that involves many processes and variables of the human being and is such a complex process, that I think we need to change our field of view. I feel like the mentality of the people working on this has to change because we are seeing this negative side and that we are not any type of aid, but it is because we are not resorting to the ideas that promote it either. So, I invite all the people who are listening to not just about the 65-year-old old man that you know. Think of your mother. Think of your father. Think about your grandpa, who is probably at an age that thinks you have the strength to do it, but somehow or another you don't. You don't necessarily have the resources now or later on. For example, when we can think of our neighbor or we can think of everything that has to do with this aging and how important a challenge we have for this phenomenon, in one way or another, better strategies need to be proposed to carry out a healthy life.

Jonathan Mena: [00:55:14]

Ok. Perfect! All right, Christopher, thank you very much for being with me tonight. I obviously want to thank you for being with me. It's been one hour. It's already 11:20 pm at night so thank you for taking your time. How do you feel after this little talk?

Christopher Mena: [00:55:37]

Well, I really want to thank all the listeners. I don't know whether to call it an interview or rant, but I do feel very good that in one way or another it is being expressed. Even if it is something as simple as this interview, it can lead to different ideas so that this concept of aging is managed, worked on, or intervened in another way.

Jonathan Mena: [00:56:05]

Perfect. With that then we leave it. Have a good night.

Christopher Mena: [00:56:13]

Good evening, everyone.

