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JAVIER TORO: My name is Javier Toro, and I'm here with Jose Rosado to talk about his life and experiences as a community leader and a member of this community in Bethlehem as a part of the Voces de la Comunidad project, and our project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engage Humanities Consortium. We are meeting on Zoom on July 10, 2020. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today, Jose. Just to start it can you please state your full name and spell it for me?

JOSE ROSADO: My full name is Jose Rosado, [00:02:00]
J-O-S-E- R-O-S-A-D-O.

JT: Thank you. Will you please share your birth date?

JR: My date of birth is December 9, 1963.

JT: Thank you. Okay. And for the purpose of this interview, how do you most comfortably want to be identified, as a Puerto Rican, as a Latino, Hispanic, or any other?

JR: I am Puerto Rican, so I believe that I identify as Puerto Rican and also as Latino.

JT: Okay, thank you. Okay, let's go through to the consent. Do you consent to this interview today?

JR: Yes, I do.

JT: Do you consent to having this interview being transcribed, digitized, and made public, available online in searchable formats?

JR: Yes, I do.

JT: Do you consent to the Latinx Archive using your interview for [00:03:00] educational purposes in other formats including films, articles, websites, or presentations?

JR: I do.

JT: Do you understand that you will have 30 days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to review my interview, identify any parts I would like to delete, or withdraw my interview from the project?

JR: I understand that, yes.

JT: Okay, thank you. Okay, Jose, let's do the first question. Will you tell us more about the early years of your life? Describe your childhood.

JR: Well, my childhood, my early recollections growing up in South Bethlehem, I actually remember the day that we moved into the South Terrace Housing Projects. I was about maybe five years old, 1968, just a young child moving into public housing. And my mother, [00:04:00] my two brothers, my father, and I moving in and spending the next, wow, you know, a number of years there, probably, you know, almost

20 years in public housing. But early on growing up in public housing I think I had a normal childhood, I guess, a happy childhood early on. You know, there were always kids to play with in the neighborhood, and, you know, it was a pretty close-knit neighborhood, predominantly Latino, predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood. And like I said, you know, as a kid I had some fun. We would play games out in the streets, enjoyed playing in the park. And I think, you know, one of the things that I recall most about it was that I really wasn't aware of my surroundings and everything else that would eventually, you know, make up who I was [00:05:00] and my life. But again, early on things were quite good. You know, there were always kids to play with, but as the years went on, I think it was probably in the early '70s when things really started to change. I think right after the Vietnam War, 1973, I had always recalled, as I got a little bit older, you know, eight, nine years old, ten years old, I always recalled, you know, living in public housing you had your older gentlemen. We used to refer to them as the winos, you know, drinking their wine. And you had the hippies that were smoking their marijuana. And you'd always see these people at the end of the block or down at the playground, but I think it was in the early '70s, '72, '73 after the

Vietnam War when those soldiers that had been fighting in the war were coming back, and we had just an epidemic [00:06:00] of heroin that just took over the community. And things really changed drastically during that time period. And you know, things really became troublesome. And the way of life changed quite a bit. So I went from, you know, being a happy kid, you know, just very modest surroundings. I actually grew up poor, but really didn't recognize that or it didn't have a tremendous impact on my life. I mean, there were many things that we went without, but, you know, we were all living under the same circumstances. But I think with the overwhelming amount of drugs, especially the heroin that came into our community in the early '70s, a lot of things really started to change.

JT: Okay. And then from that changes in your community, how that affect you as an individual, and when you started going to school, how that also [00:07:00] impact you.

JR: Well, you know, early on as little kids we played games. Roberto Clemente was our hero. I remember when Roberto Clemente tragically died in that airplane accident, and the summer of '73 actually Vera Clemente visited the housing projects where I grew up. She visited the South Terrace Housing Projects. The Bethlehem Housing Authority

constructed a new park on the hill behind where I lived. And they named it the Roberto Clemente Community Park, and that summer Vera Clemente came to cut the ribbon and open the park. So I remember that, and I remember it fondly. And we were very happy. There was just a lot of pride in the community, you know, just relating to Roberto Clemente, and all of us aspired to be the next Roberto Clemente in terms of the next baseball superstar. So you know, it was something [00:08:00] that really motivated us to play baseball, and remain engaged in those types of events, activities, and interacting with our young peers. So that was a very good time. But I think shortly after that, because of the fact that drugs had just overtaken the community where I was living in, things became much more difficult. Life became much more difficult. Early on in school, you know, my friends and I would get together in the morning. We'd walk to school. We walked to school, walk back home, and we went to a community elementary school. So the school was predominantly Latino, African American, and the poor white folks that lived in the housing projects. So we all got along very well, and we did well in school. We had fun in school. School was fun. But from elementary school I transitioned [00:09:00] into middle school, and the middle school was a little bit more

diverse, people from outside of the housing projects that were also attending this middle school. But still it was predominantly a Latino low-income, middle-income type of school. So, I continued to do well in school, but I think some of the things that I was dealing with outside of school in my neighborhood, in my community were becoming more and more troublesome. I often say that I went from being a happy kid, you know, five, six, seven, eight years old, from being a happy kid to an angry teenager because I think that I started to realize that, you know, my family, we were dealing with a lot of difficult issues. There was a lot of dysfunction in our household. And I started to see some of that dysfunction in my household. I also started to see more of the dysfunction in the community. And as a result, you know, I took on some of those, [00:10:00] I guess self-limiting lifestyles as a result of that. I often say, again, you know, when we talk about young people and how they develop and the type of lifestyle that they take on, I think we could attribute a lot of that to what happens in their home, what happens in their community, and what happens in their school. And I actually wrote a book. The first book I wrote was titled *Being Good at Being Bad: Troubled Teenagers Factors and Solutions*. And it talks about young people and their

experiences in their homes. And if you live in a home that emphasizes failure, you take on that failure. So you could have parental substance abuse, poverty, mental issues, substance abuse issues, and when you grow up in a household like that, you know, you take on those experiences. And [00:11:00] when you're living in that type of household, it becomes very, very difficult. And then you step out your front door, and in my case, you know, stepping out my front door I was stepping out into the housing projects, and again, you know, early '70s and throughout the '70s and into the '80s a lot of drugs, heroin, of course, early '70s, and the heroin use was just very prevalent throughout my community. And then in the '80s with the outbreak of crack cocaine. So again, you know, you walk out your front door and you're confronted with drugs and crime and violence and gangs, the drug culture. And that also emphasizes failure, and you take that on. And by the time you get into high school, you know, if a lot of your background, a lot of your experiences have been struggling and dealing with those types of issues, you take on that particular type of lifestyle, and that's what I [00:12:00] said in the book that I wrote, you know, being good at being bad. You know, if your home emphasizes failure, if your community emphasizes failure, you walk into schools,

you know, pushing for that third strike. You're coming into a school, especially in my case I went to a high school that was a predominantly white upper middle class high school. So, what they did here in Bethlehem was to try to desegregate schools, and they bussed poor brown and black kids like from me south Bethlehem across town to Freedom High School, which is a more white, affluent high school, and it was definitely a clash. There was no doubt it was definitely a clash. So, by the time I got to high school I was one angry young man. I was just one angry dude. And that transformation from being a happy kid, you know, growing up in the projects, being poor but not necessarily knowing that you were poor because you were just surrounded by people with similar experiences, [00:13:00] you kind of just went day to day, and you kind of just took life as it was because you didn't know any better. But as I got older and I started to deal with some of the dysfunction in my own household, and then deal with the dysfunction, the crime and the violence in my community, I kind of took that on, that being good at being bad lifestyle. And by the time I got to high school I was very angry and started to engage in a lot of those self-limiting behaviors myself with alcohol and drug abuse.

JT: Okay, taking that background in consideration, you live in this environment that was quite violent, if you transport that to today, with the new issues that we are all -- a continue of the issues that we are having of violence, racism, now the [00:14:00] police brutality, how do you compare what is happening right now or the time that you was growing up?

JR: Well, I think finally, you know, what we're having conversations about it, constructive conversations about it. You know, when I was growing up in the '70s and a lot of my friends were dropping out of school to sell heroin just to make money because financially they were struggling. And they were dropping out of school to deal drugs because the drug trade was rather lucrative. And eventually, a lot of these young people that dropped out of school to sell drugs, you know, eventually started to use the heroin themselves. I mean, a lot of them, you know, myself included when I was growing up with them, again we started to use drugs at a very early age because, again, we were surrounded by this, whether it was starting with alcohol at a young age, by the time we're in middle school many of us were [00:15:00] drinking and smoking marijuana on a regular basis. And part of that was just a self-medication because you start to realize that life is

unfair, and it's difficult. You're dealing with the dysfunction in your home. You're dealing with the dysfunction in your community. And you just want to escape. So a lot of it was just self-medication, dealing with death at an early age. You know, myself, my uncle tragically died in a car accident when I was eight years old. And my older cousin, who was 14 at the time, started to smoke marijuana just to, you know, I guess disconnect or just self-medicate, and we were very close. And most of us in the projects were very close at that time. So, you know, you had the older teenagers just starting to use the drugs, and those of us that were just a few years younger eventually just gravitated toward that. So a lot of us, by the time we were middle school, we were drinking and using marijuana. And then as we got a little bit [00:16:00] older we saw, again, the heroin trade and saw that there was money to be made in dealing drugs. And a lot of my friends gravitated toward that, selling heroin just to make money to have some money to help with the family and other things. And then they themselves started to use the heroin and became addicts themselves. And for many years what we were doing in this society was treating that addiction as a criminal issue. And I remember the '70s and the '80s and get tough on crime and referring to people that were

addicted as junkies and using those types of terms and just pushing people into jails and no treatment because most of the people in the '70s and the '80s, whether we're talking about the heroin or whether we're talking about the crack epidemic that broke out in the '80s, [00:17:00] you know, it was impacting communities of color. Obviously, you know, you had cocaine that was running rampant in the '80s as well, but the powdered cocaine was treated differently in regards to the crack cocaine. But what was happening then was that we were just criminalizing these behaviors and moving people into prison for simple drug possessions, marijuana possessions, you know, and other drug possessions. A lot of the people that I grew up with eventually became addicts, and as a result of that ended up in jail with criminal records. And what we're seeing today, I guess, you know, over the last, I don't know, maybe five or so years is that we're treating this differently. Now when we see the opioid crisis, we're talking about providing treatment for these individuals because we're looking at it as an illness, and rightfully so. [00:18:00] But if it's an illness today, if people that are abusing opioids today are sick and it's a medical issue, then we should have been looking at it that way 30, 40 years ago, but we didn't. Thirty, 40 years ago we were

criminalizing the behavior and putting people into jail. Today there's much more treatment that's being provided to individuals that are dealing with addiction. So that's one huge difference, and why is that? I mean, politically yes, I think that's a factor but also the fact that the people that are dealing with the opioid addictions today are more likely to be white middle class as opposed to heroin addicts and those that were addicted to crack cocaine in the '80s were black and brown and poor. So obviously I think that society is treating people from those different backgrounds very, very [00:19:00] differently. You know, we spent the past 40 years just moving people into prison, you know, mass incarceration in this country basically off of drug crimes. And many of those people, an over-representation of those people are people much like myself and people that I grew up with, you know, black and brown from poor communities.

JT: Right, okay. Let's continue talking about your growing up in the project. How was the relationship between the families that lived in the project with the rest of the South Bethlehem, if there was a good relationship interaction, what happened?

JR: I mean, that's very mixed, I guess. I know that there were many families that moved out of the projects. I think

those families that lived in the projects and then [00:20:00] eventually moved out, I think they had very good understanding of the people that lived in the projects and weren't very judgmental of them, whether you were white or Latino or African American. But there were others that were judgmental. I remember, you know, myself. I mean, I grew up in the projects and had friends that lived outside the projects that were also Latino, you know, Puerto Rican. And as a teenager wanting to hang out with some of those friends and their parents would discourage their children from hanging out with us. Now, I can understand why in some cases because, you know, again, there was a lot that was going on in the projects, a lot of crime, a lot of violence, a lot of drug abuse that was going on in the projects. And like I said, a lot of my friends were getting in trouble and ending up in jail. So parents would want to guard their children, and fathers probably [00:21:00] wouldn't want their daughters to date a Latino male, a Puerto Rican male coming out of the projects because, again, they would probably think that our future wasn't very bright because of the fact that we were dealing with all of the things that we were. So it was difficult. Obviously when I went to Freedom High School and now you're talking about the white affluent population, oh yes, I

mean, that was just a big clash, and those parents and even those students that lived in those areas, you know, they didn't want much to do with us. So there was a lot of prejudice that was taking place. Some of it was based on race, but some of it was also based on where we were from and the fact that we were living in public housing. We were living in the projects. So we were, I guess, discriminated against [00:22:00] not only by white middle class individuals that we were coming into contact with but even, you know, there were some Latinos, families that would think less of us because of the fact that we were living in public housing, and I guess they understood some of the things that were going on there, and they didn't want their children to be impacted or influenced by that. So it was difficult without a doubt, yes. And again, I can understand some of the reasoning for it, but I think that what I try to do is look at people individually and not judge all people, again, by the same factors when we're talking about some of those things.

JT: And during that period of time that you was growing up [00:23:00] in the project with all the social issues and economic problem they have, there was time for fun? You as a kid playing sports, be engaged in any program or something like that?

JR: Oh yeah, I mean, I was fortunate enough, you know, as a little kid to play little league baseball. And we had a lot of fun. Little league was something that my friends and I got involved in, youth football also, Boys and Girls Club. At that time it was just a boys club, but we participated in Boys Club as well. And again, you know, up until probably seven, eight, nine years old, ten years old, you know, a lot of that stuff was just fun, and we engaged in those things, and we enjoyed it and tried to have as normal a life as possible. And we really didn't know of much difference until a few years later. And [00:24:00] that's when we started to recognize those differences that things became much more difficult. And I think a large part of it was the influence of drugs and alcohol because alcohol was so readily available in the projects, drugs were so readily available in the projects, not only for use, personal consumption, but also again, you know, with the sale of drugs and looking to profit in the sale of drugs, and, you know people just started to gravitate toward that. You know, one of the things that I often say is that I believe that people are born good. Let me just take a moment to go back to that. I think that people are born good. And we have this conversation or debate, you know, nature versus nurture, and I think that naturally

people are good, but life experiences [00:25:00] do contribute, and I think in a large way do contribute and influence people in terms of the directions that they might go in life. And again, you know, going back to the book that I wrote and referencing those three primary areas, the home, the community, and the schools and life experience in those areas. So if you're a happy kid but now you're starting to realize that you're living in a dysfunctional home and you've got the verbal abuse, the parental substance abuse, you've got the poverty, that starts to take an impact on you. And you take on that negative impact. You take on that sense of failure. And again, you walk out into your community, and you're surrounded by the drugs, the violence, the crime. And you, again, start to identify with that and take that on. And I think that what happens is that [00:26:00] as you gravitate toward that you take on that lifestyle. And that's what I call again, in my book, being good at being bad lifestyle because I think that although we're born good, we aspire to do certain things, I think sometimes you reach a certain point in your life where you start to believe that, well, maybe that's just not meant for me. And as a result of your own personal experiences, you take on that negative lifestyle, the being good at being bad. So what I say is that status

and reputation is important. I think that it's important for all people. So if you're not going to be recognized, if you're not going to have status for positive things, if I'm not going to be a good student, I'm not going to be a good artist, I'm not going to be an exceptional athlete, then I'm going to be good at what it is that I can be good at, and that's why I talk about being good at being bad. And people gravitate toward those things. [00:27:00] And that's where you get into the gang structures, and you get into the drug trade. You get into those things that give you status and recognition for negative reasons. So I'm going to be good at something. I might not be the best student. I might not be the best athlete. I might not be the best dancer, artist, or what have you, but I'm going to be recognized for something, being good at being bad. And I think that a lot of young people that are coming out of these types of communities, you know, early on in life, you ask them. If you walk into a particular neighborhood and you walk into the playground, and you see a group of young children playing, they might be six, seven, eight years old, and you ask those kids what do you want to be when you grow up, you know, those kids are going to tell I want to be a doctor. I want to be a lawyer. I want to be an astronaut. Those kids are going to tell you all of these

things. I would have said that when I was six, seven, eight years old. But now you walk to the other end of the playground, or you walk down the street and you see a group of [00:28:00] young people, 14, 15, 16 years old, same neighborhood, could be part of the same family, and you ask those young people hey, where do you see yourself five years from now, you know, they're not going to give you the same responses. They're not going to give you the same responses. Some of them might say hey, I don't know if I'll be alive five years from now. Some of them might say hey, I don't know what I want to be alive five years from now. Hey, you know, life just hurts so much. So again, you go from being a happy child, because again, talking about nature versus nurture, and I believe that we're all born good, you go from being that happy child, and you transform into this angry teenager. And what happens? Life happens, life experiences, in your home, in your community, in your schools. And you go from being that happy kid with all of these goals and aspirations, to this angry teenager that's taken on this being good at being bad lifestyle, and often times getting into self-limiting, [00:29:00] anti-social, illegal behaviors and acts. And I think that that's what we have to be able to address. And we have to address it systemically, not only in our schools

but now we're talking about criminal justice reform. We're talking about systemic issues that have to be addressed, so that we can change a lot of the things, a lot of the life experiences that a lot of young people have when they're coming out of these types of environments.

JT: Okay. And Jose, growing up here in Bethlehem, you live in the predominant Puerto Rican, Latino community. When you went out to the community, do whatever you have to do as a young man, at any moment you had to defend your being Puerto Rican? Somebody [00:30:00] questioning you why you are here, or there was that type of environment for you?

JR: Oh yes. Well, early on not so much, you know, as a young kid not so much, you know, elementary, middle school, but definitely when you got to high school yes because things were very, very different. And I think one of the most difficult experiences for me was defending myself being Puerto Rican, defending myself being Puerto Rican, being Latino. And I remember back then, we would have our jean jackets with the little patch on it, "Puerto Rican and Proud," or "Proud to be Puerto Rican." And so we would wear our patch on our jeans or on our jean jacket. But then when someone would question you and say hey, what does it mean to be Puerto Rican? What do you know about being

Puerto Rican? That's when it became tough, because again, we weren't learning about any of that in our schools. All we knew was what we were being taught in our homes, you know, the culture, the music, the food. But I think there was a big void for me and for [00:31:00] many other people in regards to our history. Again, you know, I can talk about Roberto Clemente being my childhood hero and having visited Puerto Rico a few times when I was younger, I had those experiences, but I didn't have any real knowledge of the history of those important figures on the island of Puerto Rico. So here I am, you know, dark skin Latino, obviously Puerto Rican, growing up here in the United States in Pennsylvania and often times being questioned about Puerto Rico, being questioned about being Puerto Rican. And I think that that contributed in some way to the level of anger that I had because I felt very proud of who I was, but I couldn't defend myself in terms of my history because I really wasn't taught that, certainly [00:32:00] our schools wasn't doing that. We had some activities or events in middle school because we had a couple of educators, teachers, Iris Cintron who's my mentor, you know, took it upon herself to do some things. But besides that, there wasn't a lot that was being taught in our schools. There wasn't a lot of cultural events or

activities that were taking place in our schools. So there was a void there, and sometimes trying to defend that was difficult because I couldn't tell you about the history of Puerto Rico. I couldn't tell you about famous Puerto Ricans and contributions that they made. So when people would characterize Puerto Ricans as being, you know, poor, dependent on welfare and public assistance, public housing, you know, all of those things were true for me. (coughs) Excuse me. So it was difficult because I didn't see people like me in leadership positions. [00:33:00] There were very, very few, like I said, throughout my educational career, kindergarten through twelfth grade, probably a handful, Iris Cintron in middle school, and right now I couldn't even, you know, give you another name, of educators that I came across, you know, K through 12, police, physicians, doctors, no. There weren't many, and again, as I sit here, can't recall any others that I would have come into contact with. So that became, you know, difficult. And all that did was contribute to me taking on that being good at being bad lifestyle and gravitating toward that because at least I'm good at this. You can't take this away from me because I'm good at this. But again, that lifestyle, those behaviors, are very self-limiting, and all they do is just perpetuate those

negative cycles with addiction, incarceration, and [00:34:00] those types of things. So we have to break away from that cycle. But it's difficult to break away from that cycle when you don't have role models, you don't have people to introduce you to that path and guide you down that path. I remember in high school, and I don't have very many fond memories of Freedom High School, I really don't. I didn't like being there. I didn't want to be there. I didn't feel welcome there. It was very difficult. My attendance wasn't good. My academic performance wasn't good at all. But I had one teacher, she was a photography teacher, Mrs. Gornblazer, short, maybe five-foot tall, you know, in her clogs, and she was a photography teacher. But she took an interest in me because of the pictures that I took. Having photography, you know, taking a camera, black and white photos in the housing projects, and she really just thought that I had an eye for capturing certain people [00:35:00] within certain situations. And, you know, she was always very encouraging. And she would say to me hey, Jose, you know, you can do anything you want. You can be anything that you want. You're talented. You're a good person. And she was saying these things to me, and I would think to myself, wow, I mean, I must be one special person because Mrs.

Gornblazer thinks that I can be a teacher. Mrs. Gornblazer thinks that I could eventually, you know, become a probation officer or work in law enforcement somehow. And you know, I don't know why she thinks that because I don't see anyone that looks like me in any of those types of positions. So I must be one special person. Because again, I don't see any teachers in this building that look like me, but yet you're telling me I can be a teacher or I can go on to be a probation officer, or I can go on to work in some other type of profession. And it was difficult for me to believe that because again, there were no people that [00:36:00] I can recall or a significant number of people that I can recall that were in those positions. So it's very difficult to grasp that if you don't have people that can serve as mentors and role models for you.

JT: Okay. You also explained to us your life in the very difficult situations living in the projects, how was the society at this moment, the social problem that we have. How Jose Rosado transition from being in that world into the Jose Rosado that we know now? Yeah, there was some kind of role model that you follow, some people that help you to achieve that? How your mentality change for that?

JR: Well again, you know, if I go from the very beginning again, I was a happy kid. I had goals. I had dreams. I

had [00:37:00] aspirations. Elementary school I remember a teacher in second grade that really encouraged me to write, and I started writing. And I would write stories in the elementary school. I enjoyed reading. So I had those interests early on in life, you know, throughout elementary school into middle school and then, you know, I hit that stage or I hit that period in my life probably around 11, 12 years old where I just started to believe that I'm not going to be able to attain any of those goals. Those things aren't meant for me. I just started to take on more and more of my surroundings. I started to take on and become more of what my subculture was telling me I should be or what my subculture was telling me is my destination. And again, you know, the [00:38:00] self-limiting behaviors with the use of alcohol, the use of drugs, and just finding myself in very difficult situations. So you know, I struggled with a lot of that for many years. And when I got to high school, again, Freedom High School was not a place that I wanted to be in, but my mother wanted me to graduate from high school. My mother, who has a second grade education often stressed education. You have to go to school. You have to get your degree. So I stayed in school because of her. Now, I wasn't academically challenged when I went to Freedom High School. I was in

your basic courses. I was not college prep. I was absent 30 or more days. I think my senior year I was absent 56 days. And I'd come back, and I'd just make up whatever work the teachers would give me. And my only thought was all I have [00:39:00] to do is graduate from high school. I had no aspirations of going to college. At that time, I was working minimum wage flipping burgers at a fast food restaurant. And I thought to myself, look, if I can graduate from high school and not end up in jail or dead by the time I'm 18 then hey, that's a win. That's a plus. Obviously my mom would be happy, and I could make some type of life with a high school diploma and just trying to keep myself out of trouble. And I graduated from Freedom High School in 1981, and when I graduated I continued to work at the same fast food restaurant making 15 cents over minimum wage, driving a beat up car, you know, living at home, struggling but thinking to myself again, you know, I'm alive. I'm not in jail. I'm going to just make the best of what I've got. But fortunately for me, my mentor Iris Cintron, [00:40:00] and I've told this story several times, I mean, I'm sitting in the housing projects under a tree drinking a quart of beer at 3:30 in the afternoon. I'm 18 years old, just got out of work, and she drove up. She was driving through the projects. She knew many families that

lived there. She knew my family. And she saw me, and she got out of her car, and she approached me. And she talked to me about, you know, life, and asking where I was and how I was doing. She knew that I had graduated from high school. And I told her hey, look it, I got a job. I'm working. I'm making 15 cents over minimum wage, you know, I'm -- you know. It's not the best, but I'm okay. I'm doing all right. And she started talking to me about going to college. And I was like, no way. You know, scared the heck out of me. And as she's talking to me all I could think about was I want to get back to drinking my beer. Beer's getting warm, and I just want to get back to drinking my beer, but I don't want to be rude. So you know, she says hey look it, you know, if you could do anything you wanted, you could be anything you want, what [00:41:00] would you want to be? And I'm thinking to myself here we go again. You know, we're going to play this game, you know, what do you want to be when you grow up? So I said okay, let me entertain her. I says look it, you know, honestly, I'd like to be a probation officer because a lot of my friends have gotten into a lot of trouble, the drug trade, crime, addiction. I saw a lot of my friends, by that time, by the time I was 18, a lot my friend were heroin addicts, in and out of jail, struggling

with addiction, having children at that early age. They were struggling, and I saw this cycle just perpetuating itself, and I thought to myself I'd like to be a probation officer. And she says well, you can be a probation officer, and you can go to East Stroudsburg University and get a degree in criminal justice administration and become a probation officer. I'm thinking to myself no way. That's just not going to happen. I mean, I have no interest. I have no idea how to go about doing any of that. So she says to me [00:42:00] if you're interested, if you want I'll come back. I'll come back tomorrow. I'll bring an application for the college. I'll bring a financial aid application, and we can get you into school. She said you can start in a couple of weeks. I mean, this had probably -- end of May, it was like mid-May or something, and the summer program, the Act 101 summer program was going to be starting at the end of June or early July. And she says yeah, you know, there's still time. We can get you into the summer program, and if you pass the summer program then you would get admitted into the university. Because I never took an SAT test. I had no desire to go into college. But true to her word she came back the next day. Here she was with this application, the college application, the financial aid

application. I'm like what the heck's going on here? You know, she's for real. She's serious. And I was scared. I was really, really scared. And I remember having this thought. I thought about my eleventh grade social studies [00:43:00] teacher at Freedom High School. Eleventh grade social studies, the first day of school I walk into my social studies class, and the teacher is Mr. Shob, J.P. Shob, older gentleman, you know, white, mid-sixties probably, very flashy clothing colors and what have you. And he stood at the front of the class, and he stood behind his podium, and he greeted us. He greeted the class by saying, "Welcome to flunker's paradise. This class is dummy proof. I give open book tests, group tests, and take-home tests. This is flunker's paradise." And I sat there in class, and I start cheering and high fiving with my classmates, and we're celebrating, you know, flunker's paradise, oh yay, yay, high fiving and everything else. And for a moment I stopped to think, and I thought to myself, our teacher just called us [00:44:00] stupid. Our teacher just told us that we are stupid. We can't pass this class unless he dumbs it down to the point that it's open book test and group test and take home test. This is flunker's paradise, you know, you're dumb. You're stupid. And we were celebrating. And I thought to myself holy

heck, you know, wow, really? This is where I'm at. This is where I'm at. This is my course of study in high school. I'm not college prep. I'm flunker's paradise. But at that moment that Iris was talking to me about college, that's what was resonating in my head. I can't sit in a classroom. I've never sat in a classroom with college prep students. I'm flunker's paradise. I'm this poor kid from the projects, you know. I'd been surrounded by crime, violence, drugs for most of my life. This is what I know. This is who I am. I'm a poor Puerto Rican from the projects. Academically, [00:45:00] my course of study was flunker's paradise. And now here's this lady telling me that I can go on to college and I can eventually graduate and become a probation officer. And it was like, okay. You talk about self-doubt, self-doubt, you know, can I do this? There was really nothing up until that point in terms of my academic career. There was nothing up until that point that would have suggested to me that oh yeah, you can do this. There was nothing there. So it was a risk. There was nothing but doubt on my mind. But at that moment, I guess all I can say is that this lady believed in me enough to say that yeah, I think you can do this. I know you can do this. So I guess she believed enough in me that I had to take that chance. I had to believe in myself

[00:46:00] because I had nothing but doubt in my mind. I had nothing but doubt and not only doubt but fear. And my fear was that if I try and don't succeed, where do I go? If I try this, if I allow myself to go to college, be this college student, pursue this goal, pursue this dream, and I don't make it, if I flunk out, I fail out, I get kicked out, you know, where do I go? I'm not coming back to a middle class neighborhood and go back to work at the family business or the Bethlehem Steel. Those days are gone. Bethlehem Steel, those days are gone. Mack Truck, you know, where am I going to go? So if I try, and I don't make it I got to come back to the projects. I got to come back and face my friends, my peers, you know, as this college boy that couldn't make it, this poor kid from the projects that thought he could go to college and couldn't cut [00:47:00] it, couldn't make it. So that was my fear, that if I try and I don't make it, if I don't succeed, where do I go, what do I do? So yeah, the self-doubt and the fear that I had at that moment were very real, very, very real. But fortunately at that time I thought to myself, you know something? What the heck? I got to give myself a chance. So I did. I enrolled in that summer program, East Stroudsburg University. It was a six-week summer program. I did well in that summer program. I got

admitted to the fall session. Then I did well. You know, my freshman year I did well. But again, I struggled. I struggled academically because I was not prepared. I think that the six-week summer program did help me a great deal, and there were a lot of resources that were put in place by Act 101, and I think that [00:48:00] in large part that's why I was successful. And I'm a very strong advocate of Act 101 programs and those programs for nontraditional students, first generation students, nontraditional low-income students that may have struggled and underperformed in high school. I'm a strong advocate for those students and for those programs because that's the door that allowed me to go to college.

JT: Good, thank you, Jose. Okay, this is Jose on writing in college. How was your experience for you in East Stroudsburg? We are not talking that you are here in your neighborhood. You are in East Stroudsburg study. How was Jose's life as a college student?

JR: Well, I tell people my freshman year was just a wonderful experience. I mean, there was some guilt associated with it, no doubt. [00:49:00] Because growing up my mother relied on me heavily. My mother really relied on me a great deal. My father was an alcoholic. He was always very sick. There was a lot of dysfunction at home,

and my mother didn't speak English. So my father spent a lot of time in the hospital, in and out of the hospital, and my mom would rely on me to go with her to doctor's appointments, to consult with the doctors regarding my father, to translate, and she really relied on me a great deal. And when I went off to college there was a lot of guilt. I had a lot of guilt on my part because now my mom was struggling. My two other brothers had to step up and try to provide that support because I wasn't there to do it. So I struggled. The guilt was [00:50:00] something that was very real for me. I think a lot of young people in a similar situation even today struggle with that, the guilt of going away to college and not being there to support the family financially or in any other way that family expects them to. So that was something that was difficult for me. But aside from that, you know, being on campus and being on my own really for the first time away from home was that was very new for me, and I think that one of the things I had was because I had so much responsibility on me at home, and I also had this fear of failing, that I can't fail. I can't mess up. Yes, I think it's okay to allow myself to have some fun while I'm here, but I also have to be responsible enough to do the things that I need to do academically. I know that I need to

study. I know that I have to structure my time [00:51:00] in a way where I'm going to be successful. I don't want to let Iris Cintron down. I don't want to let my family down. I don't want to let myself down. So yes, I want to have some fun. I want to enjoy this college life, but I also have to be responsible to many people and make sure that I don't fail here. So that first year I did quite well. I mean, I structured my time, you know, all of the supports that I had and everything that I learned over the summer program was very, very helpful. And that first year I did quite well academically. The SISP program, Act 101, you know, the supports and resources there were incredible. But there were a lot of times where not knowing certain things, you know, the lack of academic preparation, I mean, I almost got kicked out of college before I actually started. That summer that I was on campus, it was a six-week summer program, and we had an [00:52:00] English class. We had a math class. There were some study skills classes and those types of support systems that were in place. But interesting, my English class, you know, the first day of class the professor tells us that we have to write a research paper, a term paper, and that it's going to be due the final week of the program. So he's telling us we got six weeks to write a term paper, a research

paper, and I'm thinking to myself six weeks? This is crazy. You know, I can whip out a research paper in no time, you know. So the end of the first week he's telling us this, so week two I go up to the library, and I sit down, and I'm going to do my research paper on juvenile delinquency and looking at juvenile probation and the system. So I go into the library, and this is before we had Google and everything else, and you actually had to go to a library to do research. So I pull out some [00:53:00] encyclopedias and some reference books, and I sit in the library, and I just start copying a paragraph out of this book and a paragraph out of this encyclopedia. And I just, you know, copied the whole darn thing and went up to the library for a couple of days that week, and by the end of the week, after three or four nights up in the library, I had my paper all done. So at the end of the second week, that Friday the end of the second week, I walk up to my English professor after class, and I had him my paper. I says here's my term paper. He says "Well that's not due for four more weeks. It's due at the end of the summer program." I said "No, no, no, I'm done with it." Here it goes, you know. I took the initiative. I wanted to get done early, you know, maybe I'll get some extra bonus points or what have you. So I give him the research paper,

and I walk away feeling pretty good about myself. Well, that following week Monday, after class Monday, he says "Mr. Rosado, I need to speak with you after class. I need to see you in my office." I'm thinking to myself oh, what the heck, you know. He's going to praise me on my paper and what have you. So I meet -- I go down to the [00:54:00] professor's office, and I sit down in his office, and as I sit there he takes me paper, and he throws it at me. And he says this is plagiarism. I'm like plagiarism? I said no, plagiarism didn't write that paper. I wrote that paper. And he looked at me like I was stupid. He goes like -- he says "Do you understand what I just said?" Yeah, you said something about plagiarism in this paper. I said no, I wrote that paper. He says do you have any idea what I'm talking about? I says what are you talking about? And he says do you know what plagiarism is? I said "No clue." And you know, I think the fact that he really clearly understood I had no idea what he was talking about, that's the only thing that probably saved me from getting kicked out of college before I even started. And the fact that I had to experience that, the fact that I experienced that goes back to the lack of preparation that I had in high school because in high school that's what I did. Teacher says hey, you got a research paper, term

paper, I went to the library, and I copied a paragraph out of, you know, three or four different encyclopedias and turned it in as [00:55:00] my work. Obviously I know better. I've written two books now. I understand what plagiarism is. But back then when I was in high school I guess, you know, it falls in line with J.P. Shobs and flunker's paradise. I think the teachers were probably saying hey look it, I'm not going to take the time to explain plagiarism to Jose Rosado because Jose Rosado's never going to go to college. Just the fact that he did the paper, that he took the time to write it is good, is good enough for me. I'm not going to explain to him that that's plagiarism and that you can't do that, and if some day for some reason somehow you were to go to college, you know, you could get kicked out of school for that. So teachers never took the time to explain that to me when I was in high school, you know. I was flunker's paradise. This kid isn't going to college. He did it. That's good enough for me. I'll give him a C+ and let's just move on. And you know, all that did, you know, that experience that I had in high school, [00:56:00] was set me up for failure. And I think that a lot of our kids today, even today, you know, some 40 years later, you know, their academic programs of study in their schools, especially a lot of our

urban schools, are really doing a disservice to students because we're not preparing them properly academically to be successful in college. So you know, to get back to your initial question about how did I transition, you know, the transition wasn't that clean. I went back and forth between both worlds throughout my college experience. I was still one foot in the projects and one foot on a college campus and struggling and balancing the expectations of both worlds and struggling with my experiences as this teenager, this poor Puerto Rican coming out of the projects and now this new world that I'm expected to function in which is college. I struggled with both [00:57:00] of them. And I had to learn as I went. But that first year, like I said, you know, I did well academically. I made the dean's list both semesters because I worked hard because I knew that I had to work hard and I didn't want to fail. But my academic preparation prior to that wasn't good. And the fact that I continued to have one foot in the projects while I was in college was another thing that I struggled with. I remember Thanksgiving. It was Thanksgiving break of my freshman year. So now I've been on campus for the summer and now the fall semester, September, October into November. I spent most of my time on campus up at East

Stroudsburg University coming home maybe once a month or so, but spending time on campus just because I wanted to take the time to study and do the work that I needed to do. Well, I remember coming home to Thanksgiving [00:58:00] break, and I was tired. I had no money. I had a lot of laundry to do and a lot of studying to do. So as I'm driving into the projects, at this point we were living in the Pembroke Housing Projects, I was living in the projects in Pembroke, and as I'm arriving at home I saw a childhood friend of mine, you know, walking up the street. He sees me, and he starts running over toward my car. And I hadn't seen this guy probably in a few months. And he's excited to see me. I mean, we grew up together, you know, talking about little league baseball, the Boys Club, playing games in the projects. From the time we were probably three, four years old up until this time, we were very close friends. But he had dropped out of school and got into the drug trade. And he was selling heroin, you know, to make money. I think he had already fathered one child by that time. He was actually a year younger than me. [00:59:00] And now he sees me, and he greets me, and he wants to go out to party. "Hey Jojo," my nickname, "Jojo, hey man. I ain't seen you in a while. Let's go out, man. Let's hang out tonight. Let's go party, you know. Want to hang out

with you, catch up and what have you." And I look at him, and I said "Look, you know, I'm tired. It's great to see you, but I'm tired." So I got my laundry bag over here, and my book bag over here. I says "Look, man, I'm just tired. I got a lot of work to do. Maybe we can hang out at another time." He's like "Nah, nah, nah, get rid of the book bag. Get rid of this. Get rid of that. Let's go hang out." I said "Look, I don't have any money to hang out." And he looks at me. He says "Not a problem." And he reaches into his pockets. And as he reaches into one pocket, pulls out a wad of money in his pocket, probably a few hundred dollars, \$4-, \$5-, \$600 cash in that hand, and I look at him, you know, and I'm like, "What the heck are you doing? Where you get money like that?" Now, I already knew. I mean, he's got this sheepskin coat, jewelry, the whole thing on, sneakers, you know, brand new sneakers. So I already knew, you know, where the money [01:00:00] came from. But I asked him. I questioned him. "Look, man, what are you doing? How'd you get that kind of money?" And he pulls his hand out of his other pocket, and he's got like three or four bundles of heroin in that pocket. He says "I'm getting paid. I'm hustling. I got the corner on lockdown. I'm making my money. I'm good." And I looked at him. I said "Yo, man. You know, we've been seeing this

since we was kids. There was someone dealing on that corner long before you got there, and long after you get locked up somebody else is going to be dealing on that corner." I said, "You know, this doesn't go anywhere. Hustling, dealing drugs, we've seen what happens. You're going to end up addicted, or dead or in jail." So I'm having this conversation with him on my front porch, and he's getting upset with me. He's looking at me like, "Yo, yo, timeout, you know. Who the heck do you think you are? You're just like me. This is who we are. This is what we do. [01:01:00] You're just a poor Puerto Rican from the projects. Now because you in college you think you better than me, you better than this, you better than the streets? This is who you are, you know." So he was getting upset with me. And I said "Hey look it, you know, I'm just really tired. You know, maybe tomorrow we can catch up a little bit, but right now I'm just tired, and I'm not going out. I'm not going to go out and party tonight. And let's just catch up tomorrow, and we'll talk a little bit then." But he was offended by what I had said to him, and I could understand that. And as he's looking at me and saying hey look it, this is who you are, this is who we are, this is what we do, you know, I had just spent the last six weeks over the summer, the last two or three months on campus my

freshman year struggling academically and struggling financially. And at that moment I thought to myself can I really do this? I mean, this is my [01:02:00] first semester of my freshman year. Can I do this? Am I going to be able to do this, or is he right? Is he right? Is this who I am? Is this what we do? I mean, up until that point that's all I knew. But again, you know, I think because of my mother and my mentor Iris, and just wanting to give myself a fair chance, I thought to myself no, man, I'm going to pass on that. I'm going to pass on that hustle. I'm not going to deal drugs. I've seen that lifestyle. I seen where that goes. And no, I'm going to pass on that one. So again, you know, a few days later, I was back on campus, but I continued to struggle with one foot in the projects, and one foot on campus. Am I this street boy from the projects, or am I [01:03:00] this, you know, college student? And who am I going to be? And the struggles continued. I did very well that first year of college. Like I said, I made dean's list both semesters, the fall and the spring, but the struggles would continue. The expectations of my subculture, the expectations of where I grew up, continued to be very present in everything that I did and would continue to resonate in my head. After my freshman year of college -- actually during my

freshman year of college, I started to date this young lady. This girl became my girlfriend. We started to date during my freshman year, and then that summer we spent a lot more time together. And at that point, I think I was still [01:04:00] -- I was 19 years old at the time. I was 19, and we started to have some conversations about having a kid. Many of my friends at that point already had children. You know, that friend that I was talking about just now, he had a kid. Most of my male friends had one or two kids. And some of them had children with multiple mothers. So I remember thinking to myself wow, I'm 19, and I don't have a kid yet. You know, the clock is ticking. And it's crazy. You know, I'm 19. I don't have a kid. What's wrong with me? Most of my friends have kids, and I don't have a kid. That's the expectations of the subculture. So I got to have a kid because that's the machismo. That's the expectation of the subculture. So my girlfriend and I had a conversation one day, and it was a very simple conversation. I looked at her, I said hey, what do you think about having a kid? You want to have a kid? And she said yeah, why not? She says, do you want to have [01:05:00] a kid? You're in college. You want to have a kid? I said yeah, why not? So with no thought of where we were going to live, I mean, how we were going to

raise this kid, nothing, with no thought to any of that, and that's just the street culture, the street environment, the ghetto environment, you know, that subculture. Because you know again, being good at being bad, identifying with something, identifying yourself as a father, having a kid, it gives you that status and recognition. Again, I don't advise it that anyone, my own children I certainly advised against it, but that was my mentality. That was the subculture that I was coming from. That's the experiences that I had telling me this is what you do as a poor Puerto Rican coming out of the projects, you must have fathered a child by the time you're 19 or people are going to start questioning your machismo. It's crazy. But the subculture [01:06:00] from which I come from, you know, really emphasized that. So my son was born during my sophomore year of college. And things obviously changed a great deal, because instead of living on campus, and having a more "traditional" college experience as a on-campus student, I was now in a position where I had to commute from the housing projects in Bethlehem to East Stroudsburg for two and a half years and work two part-time jobs in addition to studying full time and being a father and providing for my girlfriend and my child. So it was very, very difficult. But again, that came as a result of the

expectations of my subculture and constantly being pulled back into that subculture even though I was a college student, again, [01:07:00] having one foot in the projects and one foot on a college campus. And that continued over the next four years. And many of these struggles that I had as an adolescent continued to play out, especially when it comes to addiction. You know, I was a criminal justice major in college, so by the time I got into my freshman year, and I had that experience with my friend on the porch with the drugs and what have you, I thought to myself I want nothing to do with illegal drugs. You know, selling, using, I can't have anything to do with that because my goal, my aspiration, is to be a probation officer. So I can't have any involvement with any types of illegal drugs. So I stepped away from that stuff, wasn't using, wasn't dealing, wasn't doing any of that. But hey, alcohol's legal. So I continued to drink. [01:08:00] And it was something that was complicated, I guess, because I grew up in a household with an alcoholic father. And anyone that has grown up in a household with an alcoholic or drug addict and you know the dysfunction that comes with substance abuse and addiction, I experienced that dysfunction as a young child. I experienced the difficulties of living in that type of household as an

adolescent as the son of an alcoholic and seeing the level of abuse that someone dealing with addiction brings upon a family. It's difficult to [01:09:00] really look at yourself and say that you want to do things differently. And I always told myself, you know, when I was growing up in that type of situation, that I would never become my father, that I would not be my father and deal with those types of situations myself, or subject my family to what I was subjected as an adolescent. But unfortunately, you know, when it comes to addiction and the cycles of addiction, you don't have control over that, I think in many respects. And unfortunately, I became my father. I became that alcoholic, and that caused a lot of difficulties for me, [01:10:00] not only while I was in college but even after I graduated from college and early into my professional career. So I think that we can talk -- I had to move to plug in my battery -- we can talk about college, and we can talk about life experiences and moving out of one environment, one subculture and into another, but there are certain things that I guess cross boundaries. And one of those things being addiction, and I think that that's one thing that I struggled with for many years. Now fortunately for me, here I am with [01:11:00] a white beard. I'm 56 years old, and I've been sober for 30 years.

But I understand a lot of our young people today that are coming out of similar environments from which I came from, dealing with a lot of the same dysfunction that I dealt with in their household, in their community, low expectations in their schools, taking on those being good at being bad lifestyles, and being angry and systemic structures that just place more barriers and more hardships in front of you. So I understand all of those things very, very well. And fortunately, I've been able to survive them. And I always say that life is full of obstacles. There's no doubt. Life is full of obstacles. [01:12:00] The system will present obstacles, you know. They're the circumstances into which you're born. You don't get to choose your family. You don't get to choose where you live growing up. But those situations would definitely present obstacles to you and for you. But I've always said that the most difficult obstacles to overcome are those you place in front of yourself. So I've been able to overcome the systemic obstacles. I've been able to overcome, you know, the institutional, educational obstacles that were placed in front of me once I decided that I'm going to do this. But the most difficult obstacles to overcome are those that I place in front of myself. You know, addiction was something that was very difficult to overcome, but I

had to overcome that because without being able to overcome that, nothing else would have been possible. So yeah, [01:13:00] that's the message that I often give to our young people. You know, when Iris was talking to me about going to college and I thought to myself wow, can I do this, and what was resonating in my head at that point was flunker's paradise, and also the fact that well, if I fail and don't succeed, where do I have to come? I have to come back here. Again, that was the self-doubt, the fear and self-doubt. Those were obstacles that I had to overcome. Had I given into those obstacles, the fear, had I given into the self-doubt, then again, I don't give myself the opportunity to earn my education and have the career that I've been fortunate enough to have.

JT: Okay, Jose, before we get into the end of our conversation, I want you to talk a little bit because for me you are accomplish a lot of things that many Latinos even with [01:14:00] better opportunity than you never accomplish. Okay, Jose Rosado is an educator. He's an author. He's an speaker. He's a politician. Could you talk a little bit about that? How that Jose Rosado from a very early years was a very happy kid, in turning into an angry teenager and a struggling college students, now the Jose Rosado now.

JR: Well, I think that for me, from that moment that Iris asked me about "What would you like to do if you can do anything that you wanted to do?" I thought to myself, you know, I want to be a probation officer, because I wanted to help people that were coming from similar backgrounds. I wanted to be a voice for those people that have struggled. Now, when I graduated from college, and I started to look into a career in juvenile probation, [01:15:00] my mentor Iris Cintron again approached me and talked to me about a career in education. And she talked me into enrolling in Lehigh University and earning my master's degree in education, counseling from Lehigh, and I became a counselor at Liberty High School. And for me, I thought that what I want to be able to do is be an advocate, be an advocate for young people, be an advocate for a community, a community activist. I thought it was important to change many of the structures that were in place that were limiting, you know, a lot of our people, you know, the systemic barriers that really created obstacles for me. So I became this counselor and started to work in education and working as an advocate for young people, [01:16:00] but I soon realized that many of the things that we were encountering were political structures that had to be overcome and that I had to be in a position where I could impact change so

that we can start to change some of those structures. So early on as a guidance counselor working with students and encouraging students to do well in school, go on to college, trying to serve as that mentor, a role model, if you will, although flawed, I mean, obviously, you know. And I shared with my students my personal background. The book that I've referenced, *Being Good at Being Bad*, everything that I've talked about in this interview plus more, it's in the book. And I think that people really respected the fact that I was willing to [01:17:00] present myself with full transparency. I was never one to hide behind a suit and a tie and pretend that I'm this Puerto Rican that came out of the projects that graduated from college and now -- no, I mean, I'm a very flawed individual. I have faults and flaws, and I've struggled throughout life. And I've been able to overcome a lot of those issues that I've dealt with throughout life. And I think again, you know, students see that, and they can identify with that. And they really start to believe that hey look it, you know, he overcame this situation or overcame this obstacle, this adversity, and now he's able to be in a position where he can impact some change. So I've always come from that perspective and I think that people will respect that, that I'm going to be very

transparent about who I am, and [01:18:00] also being very clear on what my position is. When I worked at Liberty High School, and throughout my career, I wasn't going into a building where I was looking to necessarily cultivate friendly relationships with other people in the building, teachers, administrators, staff or what have you. That wasn't my goal. That wasn't my intent. No, I also didn't go into those situations looking to create controversy or to agitate folks. I was just being an advocate for the people that I was working with and working for, which is those young people. So if I saw something that I thought was not fair I spoke up against it. Where I saw injustice I spoke up against it. Always I think trying to do it in a very constructive way, you know, internally if possible, speaking with teachers, speaking with [01:19:00] administrators, superintendents. And when you're talking about in a school system and you have a strict student code of conduct where we're looking to suspend and expel students for minor infractions and we're looking to criminalize student behaviors and all we're doing is pushing kids out of school and into the school to prison pipeline, I spoke out against a lot of those things very clearly. And I think that people respected the fact that I was willing to challenge the status quo. I was willing to

challenge the system. I was coming from a position of being someone that was educated, and I think that given all of that, people really started to support me and encouraging me to seek certain leadership positions.

[01:20:00] So that's what I've done. I mean, I served as the mayor of Fountain Hill. I've been living here in Fountain Hill now for about 20-some years. And there was a situation where the mayor resigned. There was a lot of dysfunction within the police department here in the Borough of Fountain Hill, and I was approached about seeking the mayor's position, and I did. I became the mayor. I was elected twice to be the mayor here in Fountain Hill. Now again, I'm a dark skin Latino living in a borough that's predominantly white, 72 percent white, but I got elected twice as the mayor here in Fountain Hill. And I think it's because people respect my experience, my transparency, understand that I'm going to stand up

[01:21:00] against injustice, I'm going to fight for what's right, and I'm going to get the job done. And there was a lot of work that needed to be done here. We had a very dysfunctional police department. I mean, that probably just a totally different interview, another interview, but it took seven years to get things done here. Very quickly I could tell you that one of my first acts as the mayor was

to seek the resignation of the police chief that was chief at that time. And we had a situations with noncompliance with firearms, weapons, and I basically told the chief I'm scheduling a press conference for tomorrow, and I'm going to announce one of two things, and those two options are one, the chief has resigned, or two, I fired the chief. So I basically said [01:22:00] look it, your choice. We have a very serious situation with noncompliance with a firearm certification. You're the chief. You're responsible. And one of two things is going to happen tomorrow during this press conference. I'm going to announce your resignation or I'm going to announce your termination. And he resigned. And the mayor that was in my position prior to that would not make that decision, would not do what needed to be done. And then shortly after that, while I served as mayor, I also had to terminate two police officers, which again, you know, politically sometimes people don't want to make those tough decisions. Now again, I don't say that because I'm anti-police or anything like that. No, I'm not anti-police. I'm not anti-teacher. But as an educator, [01:23:00] there were teachers that were engaged in acts that were just detrimental to students, and they needed to be held accountable. So again, I think that people respect the position that I come from in terms of supporting what's

right, fighting for fairness, fighting for justice, and taking the actions necessary to correct when things aren't right. And doesn't make you very popular, hasn't made me very popular amongst some of the people that I've worked with, but I'm okay with that. I really truly believe that there are people out there that can say they do not like Jose Rosado because of the fact that he holds people accountable. But I would believe that most people would say that they respect [01:24:00] the fact that I do what I do. And that's what's it's all about. I'm not in a position where I think it's important to be liked but more in a position to be respected and do what's right and hold people accountable, you know, just like I held myself accountable. Again, I'm very transparent about my faults and flaws, and when I make a mistake I'll acknowledge it. And I think I've always been that way. So I think that people respect that. Again, not everyone's going to like that, but people will respect that. And I think that that is what my career has been about, about fairness, about justice. My career has been about standing up against unethical conduct, [01:25:00] standing up against injustice, and promoting fairness and trying to break down some of those systemic practices and policies that perpetuate the failure of our young people and especially

people of color, Latino, African American, and people coming out of poverty. So yeah, I'm going to challenge the system. There's no doubt. I'm going to challenge the system. And that's what I've done throughout my career, and I'm going to continue to do that, and I think that that's why I've been able to venture somewhat into the few of the politics and I've had a voice. And I think I'll continue to have a voice there. I think now as I'm getting older and grayer, I think I'm more in the position of [01:26:00] my mentor Iris Cintron where I'm finding myself mentoring many young people. And I think one of the things that I'm most proud of professionally, is the fact that many of those young people that I worked with at Liberty High School and throughout my career in the Bethlehem school district and a few years in Allentown, many of those young people are taking leadership positions in the community: Linda Vega, who was just recently elected school board director in the Allentown school district, Enid Santiago ran a very strong campaign for state representative. I have former students of mine that come out of similar backgrounds housing projects, dysfunctional homes that today hold PhDs and also medical doctors. And I feel very good about that because those were students [01:27:00] that I worked with, again, you know, coming from

similar backgrounds as the background that I came from, and it just feels good to think that I played a small role in helping them to get on that path and to pursue their hopes, dreams, goals, and aspirations, and become the individuals that they are today. I talked earlier about being a teen father, and again, I was 19. My wife was also a teenager at the time. We were just kids. We were just kids. And yesterday we celebrated 37 years of marriage. So what are the odds? Two kids in the projects at that age having a child so early, and here we are 37 years later, three grown children, all of them doing very well, [01:28:00] married with their own homes, seven grandchildren. My son, my oldest son who was born, you know, when I was a sophomore in college, you know, 19, he now has two master's degrees and is a principal in the Allentown school district. So we can beat the odds. Again, if you talk about the odds, what are the odds of fathering a child as a teenager, a young lady having a child as a teenager, and then 30-some years later you're still married and that child, those children, are successful? The odds are against you. But I think that that's where commitment comes into play. And we just have to work hard to help those young people understand that they can realize those dreams. This is the book. You probably can't see it there, [01:29:00] but this picture

right here, that's my wife. She's what, 18 I think at the time there with our young son, but that's the first book I wrote, *Being Good at Being Bad: Troubled Teenagers, Factors and Solutions*. But yeah, you know, that's what is. I guess we've talked about quite a bit, and I often say that if I had to do it all over again, you know, if someone took me right now at 56 and said we're going to hit the rewind button and we're going to put you back to when you were whatever, you know, 14, 15, 16 years old, and we want to see you do it all over again, I don't know. I don't know. I mean, no doubt I've worked very, very hard, no doubt.

[01:30:00] But I think that I've also been quite lucky, quite fortunate, and here I am. So it's difficult. It's difficult. And I think that for young people in that environment today, you know, I think that we have to just put things in place to help them be successful. And what we're seeing now with Black Lives Matters and talking about systemic racism, I think this is an opportune time for us as a country to do the things that we need to do to put the supports in place and tear down those systemic barriers that really work against our young people. We're talking

[01:31:00] a great deal about criminal justice reform, police reform, but the work really has to begin in our schools, with the funding of schools, resources in our

schools. We have to provide the resources in our urban schools for young people to be successful. And one of the things, there's the superintendent here in Bethlehem, the Bethlehem Area School District, superintendent Dr. Roy recently put out an anti-racism agenda. And I think that's a step in the right direction where now you have educators acknowledging the fact that the educational system has really been working against many people in urban districts. I talked earlier about being Puerto Rican and not having a full understanding of my history and my [01:32:00] culture and not learning that in our schools, now they're talking about this anti-racist agenda and having books in our school that promote culture, teach you about the culture and history of African Americans and Latinos and the contributions of African Americans and Latinos to this country. I think that's a step in the right direction, you know, when we're talking about the curriculum and really putting a lot of these multicultural initiatives in our curriculum and focusing on race and focusing on culture in our curriculum. The books and all of the things that our students are exposed to in our schools, that's all very, very important, and I applaud those efforts, but again, I also talked about the fact that I went to school in the Bethlehem Area School District K through 12, [01:33:00] and

fortunately came across my mentor Iris Cintron, but the truth is I didn't have Iris as a teacher. Iris taught in the ESL program, and I wasn't an ESL student. So I knew her from being in the middle school that I attended, and she knew my family, but I never had her as a teacher. So K through 12, I didn't have any Latino teachers. So we can talk now about this anti-racism agenda, and we can talk about curriculum, and we can talk about books and what have you that focus on a multiracial agenda and teaching about the culture of Latinos and African Americans, but if our schools aren't interested in or seriously pursuing the diversification of their instructional staff I think that we're only doing [01:34:00] half the job. You know, in a school district like the Bethlehem Area School District where 50 percent of the students are Latino, the fact that we only have maybe 5 five percent of the teachers that are Latino, we are definitely not making any gains or progress in that area. So we really have to focus on diversifying not only the instructional stuff, the teachers, but also administrators because as I sit here, almost 40 years after I graduated from high school, the number of Latino teachers in our district here in Bethlehem and across the Lehigh Valley, hasn't changed much. It's still probably five percent or less. And I think that that only changes if

there is a desire or an intent and we put in place a strategic plan to change that. [01:35:00]

JT: Okay, Jose. The conversation has been great. I've learned so much here from you, but unfortunately we have to get into end. Yeah, and I remember you called me early thinking I don't know if I can speak for an hour, but -- [laughs] That (inaudible) had been great, Jose. I'm really happy that you was able to have this conversation with us. Before we end, do you have any person that came to your head that may be a good fit for this project that we are doing now?

JR: Oh, well, there's quite a few people. I think, you know, I spoke about some of the former students that I've worked with. You know, Linda Vega who's now a school board member in the Allentown school district, Enid Santiago who ran for state representative, she would be someone that I think would be a good person to speak with. You know, I think both of them [01:36:00] were former students of mine but also share similar experiences in regards to their background, overcoming obstacles, and just challenging the system in regards to some of the things that we need to address systemically so that young people can be successful. But I mean, there are others, and I could

certainly share some other names with you via email or something, give you an idea --

JT: Oh yeah, feel free to send me any name and contact number or email for anyone that you think will be good for this project and will be good (inaudible) to contact them. Jose, again, I want to thank you for your time, for your patience to be with us here for so long. I really appreciate everything that you have been doing for our community. I know you are also a modest person. You don't say everything that you are been doing for the community, but we recognize that. And thank you, Jose, for your time. [01:37:00] Have a great night, and take care.

JR: All right, Javier, I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

JT: Okay, you're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE