

CintronIris_20210317_video

IRIS CINTRON: Hola.

JAVIER TORRES: Hello, Iris. How are you?

IC: Good, can you see me today? [00:01:00]

JT: No, I see your name.

IC: Again. Okay.

JT: Were you able to use it after you did it last Saturday?

IC: Yes. I have Zoom meetings all week. Let me try something,
because once before it happened and they told me to shut
down my computer, restart it, and see if that would work.
So, let me do that. How are you on time?

JT: I'm okay, I'm okay with time.

IC: Okay, so I'll get back on in three or four minutes, okay?

JT: No problem, take your time.

IC: Okay.

(pause) [00:01:43] - [00:07:59]

IC: Ahora, Javier.

JT: Hey, finally, I see you. (laughs) How is everything, Iris?

IC: Good, good.

JT: Okay, that's nice.

IC: Finally.

JT: Well, Iris, let's not take too much time of you, you have been so kind to try several times to connect. (laughs)

IC: I tried.

JT: I know. I experience all those kinds of troubles with technology. Yeah, I did not grow up with a computer at home.

IC: I didn't either.

JT: Yeah. Okay, Iris, let's start it. I don't want to waste any of your time. I'll open with the script. My name is Javier Torres and I'm here with Iris Cintron to talk [00:09:00] about her life and experience as a community leader in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as a part of the *Voces de la Comunidad* project. Our project was funded from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. We are meeting on Zoom on Wednesday, March 17, 2021. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today. To start, can you please state your full name and spell it for me?

IC: Sure. It's Iris M. Sanchez de Cintron. I-R-I-S, middle initial M, S-A-N-C-H-E-Z, C-I-N-T-R-O-N. [00:10:00]

JT: Alright. Would you please share your birth date?

IC: Sure, it's 11/14/50.

JT: Thank you. For the purpose of this interview, how do you most comfortably identify yourself? As Puerto Rican, Latina, Hispanic, or any other way that you want to be identified?

IC: Puertorriqueña de pura ser[00:10:28]. (laughter) Puerto Rican.

JT: I like that. Okay, Iris, let's go now to the verbal consent. I know you're already filled a written one. Do you consent to this interview today?

IC: Yes.

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

IC: Yes.

JT: Do you consent the Latinx [00:11:00] Archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats including films, article, websites, presentation, or other formats?

IC: Yes.

JT: Do you understand that you will have 30 days after the electronic delivery of the transcribed to review the

interview, identify any parts you would like to delete and/or withdraw the interview from the project?

IC: Yes.

JT: All right, let start. First question. Will you tell me about the early years of your life? Describe your childhood.

IC: Okay, well, my parents moved here from New York City, where they had arrived after leaving Puerto Rico. They went to New York. [00:12:00] I was born in New York City, and when I was approximately 11 months, they moved here to Bethlehem, because my father came to work at Bethlehem Steel, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. So, I've been here ever since. I would call Bethlehem my hometown because I didn't know another. As a youngster we lived all over the city, in the South Side, and underneath the bridge, which was the Vineyard Street area. It was the New Street Bridge at that time. That's where Musikfest goes on down in that area. That used to be part of Vineyard Street, where [00:13:00] we lived. When I was of school age, my parents had then moved back up to the South Side, to 3rd Street, and I went to parochial school, Holy Infancy School. In the first grade, for kindergarten, I attended a public school,

but I ran away, so they kept me home. (laughs) Yes, I guess I was feisty even back then. But first grade through eighth grade was Holy Infancy Elementary School, which was located catty-corner from the Holy Infancy Church, where the Litzenberger building is now. That school was torn down to make way for Litzenberger. And from there, I went to Bethlehem Catholic High School which was across town.

[00:14:00] I was in the first class that having completed four years of schooling in the new school, graduated from the new school. So, in other words, I started at Bethlehem Catholic and graduated in 1969, which was the first graduating class that attended four years at that new facility. I don't know if you want me to just go on.

(laughs) As a child, I always used to -- we lived on 3rd Street as I've mentioned. I used to look up at Lehigh University and think, "Oh, one day I want to attend that university." It was an all-male school at the time.

[00:15:00] There were a few graduate students who were females, but by and large, the undergraduate group was all males, highly engineering school. And once I graduated from high school, The Sisters of St. Joseph wanted to know what my plans were for college. I said, "I don't know. I

mean, I'd like to go, but I don't know how to get from point A to point B." And they were the ones who helped me fill out applications, and gave me all kinds of scholarship forms to fill out. And a friend of my father's had a lady friend who was a guidance counselor, [00:16:00] and she was Anglo-Saxon. And so, they took me to her. My parents didn't know how to help me, but they knew where to turn to get help. So, this lady also helped me do, you know applications and so forth. To make a long story short, I went to Northampton Community College, because my mother could not fathom any daughter of hers going away to any school and live on her own, even though at the dorms, you're not on your own. So, I graduated from NACC, and then I had applied at West Chester University. [00:17:00] While I was at NACC, I won the Ford Foundation Scholarship, which basically would have allowed me to attend any college of my choice. But as I said before in two years, my mother didn't change her mind about how she felt about my going away to school. Thanks to my brother, who convinced her that it was the right thing to do, to let me go, so I went to West Chester. And I graduated West Chester in 1973. Interestingly enough, my last year that I was there -- I

was one of two Latinos on the campus, one of two Puerto Ricans, I should say, or any Latino. The other one was a young man who had come back from the Vietnam War. He was married. He was from Philadelphia and he was a day student who attended West Chester. [00:18:00] So, I was the only younger student that was there. Interestingly enough, as I mentioned before, my last year at West Chester, there were recruiters all over the place for people to go on and do graduate work and do their master's degrees. And lo and behold, one of my professors really encouraged me to go and meet with them and see, you know, if I was interested in them and they were interested in me, to continue my education. So, when I went and I entered the room, I saw this brown up (phone rings) I'm sorry. And when I saw all the brown, and the big letters that said, "Lehigh University," I almost fell over. So, needless to say, I was highly [00:19:00] enthusiastic. When I went there, they offered me a full-paid master's degree back home. And basically, that made my dream come true of wanting to attend Lehigh University. By then, they had begun going co-ed. However, I was in the graduate program, so it didn't make any difference. But I got my master's in

secondary education, then, at Lehigh. While I was at Lehigh, I was -- I did my internship with the Bethlehem Area School District, and the rest is history. That's where I made my career and I stayed there for 37 years until I retired in 2010. That's my story.

JT: Well, [00:20:00] now, it's a great story. Something that you just mentioned that I believe you are the only person that I met that lived in that area. You said when you moved to New York, you came to the area that Musikfest is taking place now. I know there was a lot of houses in that area, but I never met somebody that told me they lived there. I met people that told me they lived on Sand Island, but never in that area. How was the dynamic there? How was that community?

IC: It was mixed. There were African Americans. There were Latinos. There were people of German descent. The grandmothers were German and only spoke German. And again, I wasn't there for too long until [00:21:00] we move back up to the South Side, but I definitely remember my preschool years being down there on Vineyard Street.

JT: And once you moved to South Bethlehem, I know the South Bethlehem of now is probably very different of that South

Bethlehem. Was the environment there? How was the community, the relationship with the neighbors, things that you do to entertain your family? How was the life there?

IC: Well, I mean, from a kid's perspective which is what I would recall, it was great. [barking] I'm sorry about the dog. My [00:22:00] father was highly involved with the beginnings of creating the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society. They did not have a physical place. It was just all on paper. He and people like Alejandrino Trujillo, who recently just passed away from the community. A Mexican man, Don Jose Gonzalez, he was involved. Other people, Ismael's -- what's Ismael's last name? I'll think of it.

JT: Garcia?

IC: Ismael Garcia, thank you. Ismael Garcia. A little bit later, [00:23:00] Jesus Alberto Rivera. And a number of men from the community got together and started creating the charter for the Bethlehem -- for the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society. There used to be a -- we had a pool hall that my father used to frequent, down on 3rd Street where we lived. My mother worked in the garment industry. She was a sewing machine operator at a number of different factories. And we mostly stuck with our own people, you

know. As they say in English, "Birds of a feather flock together." We were all held together by [00:24:00] Holy Infancy Church because that's where all of our people met. They went to mass. And I remember the first priest who was there, his name was Padre Roldan, and he was from Spain. And he, I think, was the first Latino, or person who spoke Spanish, at Holy Infancy, Padre Roldan. After him, then a number of other priests came, but for those of us who were Catholic, that was -- and that was the majority of us. My parents were one of maybe four or five families who first arrived to the area. And so, they knew everybody. My mother was a born social worker. She would welcome everybody to the community, tell 'em how they can go about getting to the church, [00:25:00] how they can, you know, do whatever. She would go to yard sales, even in those days, and pick up, like, irons, and pots and pans, and give them to the newcomers. And my dad just worked at Bethlehem Steel with the best of them, you know, with the men. And Bethlehem Steel is what brought many families here because they hired our men. And in those days, if you worked at the steel, you were pretty financially okay. And I think that most of the Latinos who were here back then, whose

fathers worked at Bethlehem Steel [00:26:00] -- I'm thinking of people my age -- they were able to go to college and do whatever they could with their lives because of the financial stability of the family, because of employment of the head of the household. So, that was interesting, as I look back on that. You know, other people like Marin Rodriguez, was also -- I'm sorry, involved with the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society. And, you know, they were just okay. Los Vazquez también, [00:26:50], Sonia Vazquez's parents. You know Sonia. [00:27:00] So, you know, the environment was a little bit clannish, like I said, in terms of us sticking together. But I think it was a way of surviving some of the things that our families would go through. Example. You know how we are. We love to play dominoes. So, the men would get together and they would be playing dominoes. Where? Outside because of the sun, you know. The police were constantly called and said that, you know, we were making noise on the sidewalks. And the police would come and cite the men for loitering. When we would have, at Christmas time, parrandas, well, forget it. "The Puerto Ricans are out loitering again on the streets and disturbing the peace. [00:28:00] They're

knocking on doors and, you know creating a havoc," and what have you and not only would the people in the parrandas get fined, but also the homeowners where they would go to. The little bit that I can remember. Now, nowadays -- and this is in contrast, or even not just now, but I would say 40 years later, when the parrandas would come and people will call the police, they just say, "Oh, don't worry. That's just the Puerto Ricans caroling. The whole commotion will be over in about five minutes. They'll go into the house and that'll be the end of it." Because you know that's how it is. You sing and you dance, or you sing, and you play the guitar for five minutes before they let you into the house, [00:29:00] and then once you're indoors, you're not bothering the neighbors anymore. So, it took a little bit of education about our culture for people to understand. But it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy in those days. But we survived. I think those people who came here early on were determined to make Bethlehem their home and to raise their children and educate them here, in Bethlehem, so. I don't know, I can ramble on for an hour but let me stop there.

JT: Oh, no. Go ahead. Go ahead, Iris. (laughs) Feel free to talk as much as you want. I don't have any problem with

that. You mentioned that your father was one of those first families, [00:30:00] or the first individuals to get involved to establish the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society. How important was the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society for our families?

IC: Very important. It was critically important. Because once they got the Society established and all of the paperwork, they wrote bylaws. And if you read those bylaws you would think that they were college graduates who wrote them, and I don't think any of them had more than a third or fifth grade education, really. But they knew exactly what they wanted. They wanted a safe place where the families could go, the families could go. The men would drink, the ladies would chit-chat, [00:31:00] and as a kid, I remember the floors. Once they got a facility, the floors were real shiny, and we used to slide up and down the floors and just have a ball. That usually took place on Sundays. The ladies would cook, the ladies from the club and they would sell the food. So, it gave them a place where they could congregate and talk about the difficulties that they were facing in their jobs and in the community. Now, the church did a lot of that as well but not the social part of it.

Nowadays, they do, do a lot of social stuff at the church, but in those days, I don't recall that they did much of that, at all. So, the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society was really instrumental in forming the community, if you will. [00:32:00] Then, you know, as years went by, other churches got up and running in the area that served our people. Early on, the Council of Spanish-Speaking Organizations of the Lehigh Valley also formed. And that was because newcomers kept coming, you know. People kept coming. You know how we are, we attract our families and the cousins, the sisters, the brothers, brought their families. And so, the community began to grow. So, the Puerto Rican Beneficial -- no, sorry -- the Council of Spanish-Speaking Organizations was formed -- I'm talking years later, when I has already -- when I was in college that this was going on. And they were a social service agency [00:33:00] that provided a place for people to go and get help, once they came to the area. They got help getting connected to the social services, getting connected to the schools, getting connected to, you know, food banks -- although they weren't called that in those days, but they were places where you could go and get coats, for example, and things like that.

So, after the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society did their thing, and the families early on were able to go there and congregate and all get to know each other, after that happened [barking] -- I'm sorry, again. The -- Let me just [00:34:00] shout at them for a minute. (pause) I apologize again. Then the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society became more of a social place. It was a club, un club puertorriqueño le decía [00:34:20]. So, that's where people went to dance and drink, and there was a kitchen in there and what have you. So, the Spanish Council took over the other part, the social service, kind of, services for the community. Oh, let me think. That was also an organization that was put together by people like Sergia Mannes and Miguel Morgado, and [00:35:00] Father John Campbell. And, you know I don't want to just name people, because there were a lot of people involved, Tony Salazar and, you know other people. They worked hard to create bylaws. And Blanca Smith was our first executive director. I don't know if you ever got to meet Blanca, but she was the one that basically got the ball rolling with the clients, and hired staff to help the people. There were even transportation services. Don Santana used to drive

the Council van. [00:36:00] They used to have great job employment kind of services. In fact, my husband got his job through an interview that he was sent on by the Spanish Council. He worked there for 39 years until he retired. It was a great company, out in Macungie. But places by that time were looking to integrate their -- I don't know if integrate is the right word, but they were looking to get one or two Latinos on their staff (laughs) and so he was the token at Buckeye Partners, which is where he worked. So, you know, the church, Puerto Rican Beneficial Society, and the Council of Spanish-speaking Organizations were the three major organizations that formed our community. Y ya. [00:37:00]

JT: Iris, I wanted to ask you, you are part of a group of women, Puerto Rican women, that have been a part for a long time for the Bethlehem School District, in an administration position. That is rare that happened because we were a small group of individuals here. But very early in the school district -- at least one where we can start moving, we had that tradition of women working in the administration. How did that start, and how important

did you think that relationship helped our families in Bethlehem?

IC: Well, okay. I'll tell you how I started my career.

[00:38:00] I had an interview with Sergia Mannes, who was the first administrator in the school district. She was the only one fighting for the rights of our kids, because in those days, they used to put the kids in special education because they couldn't speak English. And she knew as a teacher who came from Puerto Rico, that that was wrong, that there was nothing wrong with the cognitive abilities of our kids. It was just that they didn't speak the language. And so, they needed language teachers, not to be put in special education. The sad part about that, Javier, was that, in essence, they retarded generations of Latinos, by effectively, keeping them in those special education classes. Many of them got tired of it and [00:39:00] quit school and whatever. But Sergia Mannes gave me my first job as a teacher at Broughal Middle School. Broughal, at that time, was a junior high school, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And when she hired me, she said, "Iris, let me be perfectly frank with you. You are one of two or three Latinas from Bethlehem that have

come back to teach here. And you cannot be a good teacher unless you are involved with your community, and unless you are involved with the agencies that are helping the community. So, next Thursday, I want you to go with me to a meeting." I said, "Okay." I mean, how do you say no to the lady who just gave you [00:40:00] your first job? I said, "Fine." So, that Thursday, I went to my first Spanish Council meeting, of which I was a member for more than 35 years -- not consecutively, but I was on the Spanish Council board for a long, long time. And Sergia was right. It was there, coupled with my experiences in the school, that I was able to perhaps affect a little change for our people, because I knew what the needs were in the community. It was really hard. Our people did not go to the school. The school was not a very welcoming place for them. And, you know, I'm not trying to pass blame on anybody, but I am saying that our people suffered [00:41:00] through that whole thing of not feeling welcomed. When I got to Broughal, I remember the first parent-teacher conferences. As I waited for my kids' parents to come, the teacher next to me said, "I don't know what you're hanging around waiting for, because your

parents never come here." And I thought to myself, "You know, that can't be all that true," because my parents were very involved with -- when I was going to school. Sometimes they had to take an interpreter with them, but they were there. So, I went to the office and I said, "How did you notify my parents that they were, you know, invited to these parent-teacher conferences?" "Oh, right here." They pulled out one of those legal-sized papers, very long, [00:42:00] and at the bottom it said, "There are parent-teacher conferences on May 15th," or whatever. Only in English. And there was no follow-up. I said, "Ah-ha, well that's the reason they're not here. We'll see for the following ones." And I had a teacher assistant at that time, her name was Ellie Roseman. I don't know if you ever got to meet Ellie, but Ellie Roseman was my teacher assistant and so I said to her, "I want you to sit down and call every one of those parents, and if they don't have a phone, you go to their house, and you tell them that parent-teacher conferences are, you know, such-and-such a date, and that I want to see them all here." Then I got together, and I wrote on a little sheet in my own handwriting, "This is Ms. Sanchez, I'm a new teacher here

at Broughal, I'm the one who works with your kids, and I very much want to meet you, por favor, vengan. A tal hora, tal dia [00:42:59] [00:43:00]." I had 38 kids. Teachers today would die if they would have 38 kids in the classroom. I had 38 kids, and I had 36 parents who showed up representing those kids. And the two doesn't show up is because they worked at Lehigh University at three to 11 and they couldn't get out. So, that proved to me, and the administration probably, because this didn't prove anything to the teachers, they were, they had their minds set that our parents just didn't care. But our parents did care. And if they were approached the right way, they were there. And so, that was an eye-opener. So, I decided that I needed to do more of that work, and I couldn't do that as a teacher at Broughal. So, an opportunity opened up to go to the Education Center, [00:44:00] and Mrs. Mannes, once again, really helped me to get a job at the Education Center. Not as an administrator, but as a school social worker. So, I went there, and I worked as a school social worker for a couple of years. And from there, I was able to effect changes, you know, at all the schools, not just the South Side schools. And by effect changes, I mean I

was able to get information out to them in Spanish. I was able to visit homes of troubled kids and get the parents to come in and meet with the administrators, things like that. And then finally, Mrs. Mannes was going to retire and so she [00:45:00] very much wanted me to get her position and recommended me highly, but I didn't get it. It went to another Latina, Rosalie Morales, who, you know, was a great teacher. And she was in the position for a couple years and left. She went to Allentown; she became principal of Dieruff High School. So, then I reapplied, and I got the position then. So, it was like, you know, it evolved. I evolved into those positions. And of course, as I was there, part of my job was to recruit teachers. I went to Puerto Rico to recruit teachers. I recruited them out of New York. I recruited them out of New Jersey, [00:46:00] because the administration told me they can't find teachers. I said, "Oh, I can find them. You may not be able to, but I will." And I found them, and I brought them, and they hired them. Interestingly enough, I went to Puerto Rico to recruit teachers, but I did not have hiring authority. So, I went there, I interviewed the teachers, talked up Bethlehem like you wouldn't believe, and then

told them, "If you're really interested in this job you have to go to Bethlehem and interview," and they said, "Without *aseguranza* [00:46:36], assurance that I'm going to get the job?" I said, "Unfortunately, I don't have the capability of hiring you." And they came. Six or seven of them, and they were hired. Then they went back to Puerto Rico to pack up to come back. I mean, you know, it was really *se va tan difícil*. [00:46:58]. It [00:47:00] was difficult. It was difficult. But we did it. At one time, while I was the administrator in charge of the bilingual program, which was under my umbrella, we had the largest staff of Latinos, mostly Puertorriqueños, working in the Bethlehem Area School District. And people would call us and say, "How did you do that?" Well, you just have to make up your mind that you're going to do it, you're going to recruit wherever. Whenever I would hear that there was someone who came from Puerto Rico whose daughter was a teacher, or had been a teacher in Puerto Rico and was unemployed, I would make it a point to go see them. And if they wouldn't come to me, I would go to see them. I was also -- [00:48:00] and I don't want to be tooting my horn here, but I also helped people navigate through the system

in order to become certified. That was hard enough for somebody who had been born and educated in this country, let alone for someone who would come from another country and didn't know Jack about how to go about doing that. So, I would sit with them, and I would say, "You need to get this paper. You need to get this, certificado buena conducta, [00:48:26] your grades, you know, your transcripts have to be formal. They have to come directly from the university. You can't touch them or see them. Even if they have a seal, they don't allow that." I would hook them up with certification, and all of that to help them to get certified so that they could keep their jobs once they got them. We were able to get some of them under emergency certifications, but not all. So, it wasn't easy, but it was [00:49:00] doable. It was doable. And from there, you know, I started saying, "I can't do this all on my own. We have to advocate for people to become principals and supervisors and get in and help in these other areas." And that's when they opened up some principal positions to Latinos. Guadalupe Matias became principal of Marvine, and Sonia Vazquez went to Donegan, Sandra Figueroa was in the district at that time. Advos

Vaughan in Broughal, Mary Colón came on. So, they started, then, hiring our people. And mostly women. Con el tiempo, Eric Fontanez, [00:50:00] whose mother had been a kindergarten teacher at Marvine until she retired. And now, you're going from one generation to the next of people that are, you know, staying in the district. That all took a long, long time to get together and to smooth through, but again, it was doable. It was doable. Unfortunately, now, as our teachers are retiring, they're not being replaced by other Latinos. I'm not sure of the reason why. Maybe they think that there are -- the candidates are not as readily available as they would like them to be. But I would refute anyone who would say to me that there are no candidates available, [00:51:00] because there are candidates available. I don't know. So, a lot of what was built back in the day is crumbling, now. So, I don't know. One of the people that I recruited who was from Bethlehem and out of New York was Vivian Robledo. Vivian was Marta Robledo's daughter, who had a beauty shop down on 4th Street. And I said, "What's your daughter doing in New York?" She says, "I don't know, se fue pa' ya [00:51:43], because that's where she went to school, so she likes it

there." I said, "Give me her phone number." I called her. I said, "Vivian, I remember you as a little girl. What are you doing in New York? We need you, your people need you here in Bethlehem." That's the stuff I used [00:52:00] to pull on them. And she goes, "Well, Iris, yes I know, but my life is here." I said, "No, it isn't. Your life is here in Bethlehem. That's where you're from. This is where your life is. We need you. Come up and talk to me." So, I talked her into taking a counseling job here and she did, and the rest is history. Now she's the highest-ranking Latino administrator in the school district. So, you know, I don't know what I'm trying to say with all of this is, but definitely we need to continue to encourage and help our people to, you know, fold into these positions because it's not easy. But it's doable. So, that's how it went with all of the females. [00:53:00]

JT: Yeah, but, at least part of our history, and we have to talk about and recognize here all the important things that our community are doing for the City of Bethlehem have been done in the past, and we continue doing it. Taking into consideration that you've been in Bethlehem all your life; how do you see the city of Bethlehem moving forward in

comparison to how it was in the past when you were a little child? And how everything evolved, and how do you see the future for the City of Bethlehem? And especially of course, for our community.

IC: Well, it's interesting because certainly, we are not where we used to be. Things have changed for the better. We now, [00:54:00] in some areas have a seat at the table, which is important because unless you're at the table, you can't bring up issues that affect our community. But oftentimes, you're the only one seated at the table and as one member of, you know, a board of 15 others, yes, you can bring your point across, but you can't often affect a whole lot of change, because it goes nowhere. So, I have seen, you know, more of our kids, for example, go on to college, more of our people assuming jobs, responsible jobs in offices, and in entities like the hospital, [00:55:00] you know, the school district, everywhere, social service agencies, where our -- our people go. I don't think they did that as a favor to us (laughs) they did that out of need, because people would come to those agencies and people would go to the hospital, and there was no one that could communicate with them. So, out of the need that they

had to have Spanish-speaking personnel, they began looking to hire some of our people. They would sometimes go through our agencies, like the Spanish Council, to get names and get people placed in jobs. We began to develop programs through the school district that would put kids in the hospital, as a group, to see if they liked that environment so that after they would graduate, they would think of that as a career. [00:56:00] We worked with CareerLink in those places to try to get people involved. We were able to get a seat at the table on the on the board at CareerLink, and Luther Matias served on that board for a while. And so, as we became more visible, things started happening for the better. And then of course you had people coming into offices, and administrators, mayors, where they, too, would see the need and the benefit of including us and giving us a seat at the table. The hardest nut to crack was the police department. They did not -- They have a [00:57:00] number system, a point system, and you can get 10 points once you take the exam added to your score if you were in the military. But you couldn't get not even one point to be added to your score if you spoke a second language. We fought that fight for

years and years and they would not budge. As a result, our police department is not representative of the number of people in our community. Firefighters. We had to fight to get one person into the fire department. Very, very difficult. And at the time the mayor would say, [00:58:00] "You know, there's nothing I can do. The point system has been there forever." And I don't know. But that was frustrating. Meanwhile, if there was a burning house, they'd have to pick somebody out of the crowd to say, "Ask them if there's anybody in the house." You know. So, we're not where we used to be, but we certainly are not where we need to be. That's the best way I could put it. Have things gotten better? Yes, they have. Yes, they have. Now, almost everywhere you go, you see Latinos. You know, I'm so happy, because I think that I had just a little bit to do with that, early on, in terms of getting people to the right places. But I'm not the only one. There were [00:59:00] lots of people working for the benefit of our people, people like Doris Correll, who was the administrator for the Second Language Learners in the district, a very talented teacher who rose through the ranks. As I said, Sonia Vazquez, who was probably one of

the best principals that we ever had at Donegan before her son, Rafi Edoa, who was an excellent administrator, who I stole from New York, also. Mary Colón, who was the first principal to go outside of the areas of where the Latinos, you know, were assigned to. She was assigned to Clearview Elementary School, on the West side of Bethlehem. That was -- When [01:00:00] that happened, I said, "Oh, we're getting somewhere now." (laughs) And there are so many, you know, again -- I don't want to forget anybody so I don't want to keep mentioning names, but there was a good crew. Most of them women. Most of them women.

JT: Okay, Iris, I want to respect your time. I don't want to take too long with you, but I would love to stay here for hours. (laughs) I don't have any problem with that. Is there anything else that you want to add to this conversation that you feel is important to say in order to preserve for future generations?

IC: You've got to believe. You've got to believe, and you have to speak for those who cannot [01:01:00] speak for themselves. I, you know, I always believe that we could do the things that people would say we couldn't do. I always believed that about kids. You can be whatever you want to

be. You have to work hard. But, you know, there are some people that we have to speak for, because they can't speak for themselves. And we always have to strive to, you know equal or level the playing field for our people, and our kids. Never give up, [01:02:00] no matter how hard it gets. And most especially, don't ever forget where you came from, who your parents were, and for God's name, if your name is, you know, Velazquez, do not pronounce it Velazquez, because it starts there. It starts with the pride that you have in your name, and where you come from. I always used to tell my kids, "You know, if you meet up with someone whose name is Smith, and you would pronounce it Smythe, guess what they would say? 'It's not Smythe, it's Smith,' with lots of pride. That's the same kind of pride you have to have when you pronounce your name." I guess that I'll get off my horn now, while I'm ahead.

(laughs)

JT: Okay. All [01:03:00] right, Iris. I want to thank you for your time. It's always a pleasure to talk to you. I have great respect and admire for you and what you have done for our community. Thank you again for your time. I appreciate it. I really appreciate this conversation.

IC: It was my pleasure.

JT: Have a good day.

IC: I'm going to be able to watch this, right? And say to you,
"Take that out," and "Take that out?"

JT: Yes, you are going to receive a copy. We're going to email
it to you, a copy of the interview, and then you review it.

IC: Okay, will do. Okay, Javier.

JT: Have a great day, Iris.

IC: You as well. Bye-bye, now.

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