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JANINE SANTORO: [00:17:07] My name is Janine Santoro, and I'm here with Dr. Javier Avila to talk about his life and experiences as a community leader in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as part of the Voces de la Comunidad Latinx Oral History Project. This project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, and we're meeting on Zoom on July 27, 2020. Thank you so much for meeting with us and sharing your time and your talents with us today. To start, can you please state your full name and spell it?

JAVIER AVILA: Javier Avila, J-A-V-I-E-R, Avila, A-V-I-L-A. And that's it. I did a good job there.

JS: (laughs) And will you please share your birthdate with us?

JA: September 15, (coughs) I forget the year, [00:18:00] but I believe it is 1974.

JS: Perfect. And --(laughs) Nothing to be ashamed of. So just a few questions before we begin. Do you consent to this interview today?

JA: Yes, I do.

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

JA: Yes.

JS: Perfect. Do you consent to the Latinx Archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats, including films, articles, websites, presentations?

JA: Yes.

JS: Wonderful. And the last one, do you understand that you'll have 30 days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to your email to review your interview, identify parts that you want to delete, or withdraw your interview completely from the project?

JA: Yes.

JS: Okay, wonderful. So we're going to get started. We're going to get started with where all good stories start, at the beginning. [00:19:00] Can you tell us about the early years of your life, your childhood, what it was like growing up, from the very beginning?

JA: Yes. I grew up in a very loving household in Puerto Rico in a city called Bayamón, which is the metropolitan area. Bayamón is hot. It's very, very populated, and it's in the

San Juan metro area, which meant that we had a lot of traffic jams, but we also had a lot of fun. So -- And whatever you experience every day you consider normal, so for me, a one-hour long traffic jam for a 10-mile distance was normal, and my mom was a school teacher in a public school in San Juan, and my dad was a mailman. He was actually the mailman in my neighborhood. So those were my origins, and they focused on my education.

[00:20:00] They wanted me to have the best possible education, so I was in a very fancy private school where a lot of rich kids go to, and I was middle class, but I went to that school, and I had a top-notch education, where if you were an advanced student, they -- you could be placed into the all-English program. It's called the Continental Program, and that's where I was, which is why I learned English from the very beginning. Second grade, third grade, I was speaking English. All my classes were in English, and I developed a great love for the English language, which eventually meant when I became a writer, the first books that I wrote were all in English. I remember in Puerto Rico, people asking me, "Por qué tu, que

eres Boricua? Why, since you're a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican, why are you writing books in English?" But for me it was normal because my academic language was English.

[00:21:00] So I loved to write, to read and write. My mom and dad had books all over the house, and I was also -- I did many physical things. I skateboarded. I played baseball. You know, Puerto Ricans, we play baseball. But I loved to read and write. And my mom and dad respected my eccentric, artistic inclinations in part because I had -- this is where the story gets a little sad but it's a happy ending because I'm still alive -- I had a heart defect when I was little, and I needed open-heart surgery when I turned nine years old back in 1983. And what that did to me was I thought -- I thought I was going to die young, but instead of being sad about it, I thought, life is urgent. I need to get everything done now, and I need to do everything as well as I can because I'm going to die young, and I need to leave my mark. [00:22:00] And I thought of that since I was eight or nine years old.

And I think my parents let me do whatever I wanted because they thought I was going to die young, too. So the thing is I always wanted to do academic, creative things. I never wanted to do crazy stuff, so here I am. Even when I was a teenager, when I was in college, I was not interested in drinking or smoking. And when I tell my students, they don't believe me. They're like, "What? You've never smoked?" No, I've never smoked. I've never been drunk in my life. If I had a little bit of a drink, I'm like, "Okay, that's enough." But anyway, my childhood was great, and then when I graduated from high school -- wow. I really skipped 18 years really fast. When I graduated from high school, I went to the University of Puerto Rico. I could have gone to several colleges, several universities in the US, but my dad got sick -- [00:23:00] he had Parkinson's -- and I wanted to stay in Puerto Rico, so I stayed at -- we call it La U P -- UPR, and that's where I did my bachelor's in English. I did my master's in English, concentration in linguistics and literature.

And then I was very lucky that at 23 years old, I applied for a job as a professor at the University of Puerto Rico,

and somehow I beat the 18 other candidates, and they gave me the job. They were -- I mean, they took a leap of faith on a kid, basically, but that's when I started. So I've been teaching 21 years, and, but it all started then. My god, I was so nervous. The first day I taught, it was a seven o'clock class, [00:24:00] and I was wearing a suit and tie to try to look older, and as I go into the classroom, my heart just goes from my chest to my throat, and I just told my students, I just opened the door, and I said, "Listen. I'm nervous. I think I'm going to have a heart attack. I want to tell you it's my first day doing this. I know my material. I think I'm going to do a good job, but I need your help."

And that, without thinking, that became my greatest teaching philosophy. I'm going to be honest with my students at all times, and they're going to see the truth, and I'm going to treat them not as though they are any less than I am. We're partners on a journey together. So that started, and I'm still practicing that, full honesty with my students. And sometimes they don't like to hear that because sometimes it's criticism or critiquing their work,

but I find that they enjoy that. They appreciate that.

[00:25:00] Okay, so now I'm 23 years old. I'll let you ask the question.

JS: Yeah, well we can talk about -- because 23 years, growing in Puerto Rico, what were some of the places you felt connected to your community? Can you talk a little bit about your friends or who are the people that you felt really supported by? So your parents were -- So you were very heavily influenced by your parents and inspired by them, it sounds like.

JA: Yes, definitely. My parents, my friends in my neighborhood were amazing, and I had four or five really, really close friends in high school. One in particular, his name is Nicky, and he was very creative, so he wanted to be a filmmaker, and I wanted to be a writer, so we would get together, and he would make his films on his 8 mm camcorder, and I would often play the leading role also. I was not an actor, but I would play the leading role. I remember we -- in 1991, when we were -- oh my god -- 15, we wanted to recreate [00:26:00] Robert De Niro in *Cape Fear*, so I spent like weeks working out, and he drew all the tattoos on me, and I didn't have any chest hair or

anything. So we cut his hair, and we put his face -- head hair glued onto my chest. That's the kind of kid I was. We were creative. We wanted to do stuff like that, and we did it. We had fun. I wonder if that video is still around. I could be blackmailed from that.

So anyone who was creative was a good friend of mine, and in college, I met a few artists also. And it's good to be around people who believe -- who are like-minded, who believe that art matters, that art is useful. So yeah. So I hung out with a lot of artists, but I was a little different in that the school I had attended all my life until high school was a military academy, [00:27:00] so I had a military discipline about my art. So whereas many of my artist friends would believe in inspiration -- "okay, I'm going to write when I feel like it" -- I had discipline. I said, okay, I'm going to write four hours every day for the next four months, and I'm going to finish this novel. And that was a combination of that military discipline and the artistic inclination, which helped me a lot. I loved literature, and I loved math, which is unusual in people who like literature. They kind of stay



away from the sciences and the math, but I loved it. And I think it's good for poetry, too, to be a lover of all disciplines. That consilience of knowledge helps, especially when you're writing sonnets and you're writing specific formats. So yeah, that was my influence.

[00:28:00] And I loved to go to old San Juan. Almost every weekend we went to old San Juan, which is where my dad grew up, and he used to take me to Calle Tetuan, Calle Fortaleza. We used to go to El Morro and fly kites. And he used to give us history lessons every time. "Oh, this is where Coco Morales and I were friends." Coco Morales is a famous Puerto Rican filmmaker. "And this is where I used to jump off this bridge and into the ocean." It was great. It was a different Puerto Rico then, I think. Puerto Rico kind of changed when I was in my 20s, but I think just childhood is like that. Your parents shield you from danger, but yeah. I can say I was really -- I really enjoyed my life there.

JS: Wonderful. What were some of the expectations from your parents? I mean, they seemed very supportive of where you were going and supported your [00:29:00] academic

endeavors. Were there any kind of expectations regarding, like, marriage or family or where you were going to live? Did you feel, or -- Are there things that they did that shaped -- I mean, you mentioned your father having his illness.

JA: Yeah. My dad was fully bilingual, and he always wanted me to be bilingual. He said, "You will need to learn English because that's going to take you far." And that's why he wanted me to be in that school where I would have all-English instruction. My dad had a bachelor's degree in accounting from NYU, and he thought -- I mean, many of my friends from high school ended up in the US, the continental US, so my dad kind of predicted that I would end up somewhere in the US. I didn't because when he got the Parkinson's and he had two strokes, and he was very ill, I thought, "I'm going to stay here."

[00:30:00] But in 1996 when I had just finished my bachelor's, and I had just started my master's, that's when he passed away, and I thought, okay. Well now life is going to be different because I don't have to stay to take care of him. And I didn't right away move. I ended up

moving in 2006, so I spent another 10 years in Puerto Rico, but what I did do was I started working at UPR at the age of 23, and I had to sign a contract that specified that I was going to have my PhD within five years in order to have tenure and have all that good stuff, that job security. So I did, and I wanted to find a program that would allow me to study in the summers, so I could keep having my full-time job during the school year. And of all places, in Indiana, Pennsylvania, [00:31:00] that's where I found my program in IUP. I was literature and literary criticism program.

One thing leads to another, as you see. I went there for three summers. The last summer I was there, that's when I met the woman that I ended up marrying, who is from Pennsylvania, from the Pocono area, and I said, well, you know, I have -- when we were interested in getting married, I said, I have a full-time job. I have tenure. I got the PhD, so come to Puerto Rico. Come live in Puerto Rico. Here I am asking a white girl with blue eyes to come live with me in Puerto Rico because as far as I was concerned, in Puerto Rico, I was also a white man. So she came to

live in Puerto Rico for three years, and that's when I first started to think about race in a way that I hadn't before, when everybody would look at her, stare at her, and she'd say, "Honey, why are they looking at me like that?" I said, "It's because you're white. Like, you're really, really white, and you're unusual. You stand out."

And there were expectations of her to act a certain way. They expected her -- People thought she had a lot of money just because she was a gringa in Puerto Rico. And she understood what it was like to be different, to have her name mispronounced. And I had a little bit of that when I studied in the summers, but I was mostly studying. I didn't really have the time to live and experience the American lifestyle. Three years later, she says, "I want to be closer to my family. Let's move. I know we're not going to live in Wilkes-Barre because, you know, that's maybe not an area that we really want to live in, but I see this little, like the town of Bethlehem, there's a job there [00:33:00] at Northampton Community College. Why don't you apply?"

My first instinct was "Bethlehem, isn't that in the song 'Allentown' by Billy Joel, when he sings, 'Out in Bethlehem they're killing time?'" I'm like, that's all I know about Bethlehem. It's a steel town. I don't know if I want to go there. And she said, "Let's give it a chance. Let's see, and you know, let's see pictures." I saw some pictures. I also didn't know if I was going to fit in to community college because I thought, community colleges, you have to teach five classes. It's a different population. I'm used to teaching two classes and getting release time to write my books. I'm an academic. I didn't know. But they were very nice, the NCC people, and they flew me in, and when I met them, my future colleagues, I realized there's something here that I like.

And then we went to downtown Bethlehem. This was in 2 --[00:34:00] April of 2006 -- wow, 14 years ago -- and I see the town, and I go, "This is really nice." I go around to see, "Okay, where is my Latino food? Where can I find Latino food?" Go to the south side, and I see that there is a place that you can get empanadillas and arroz con habichuelas, and I go, "Okay, okay." I look at the

demographics, and I think at the time, it said it was 18 percent Latino, and I go, "Okay, that's good, that's good." Because you know, I want to go to a place -- everybody wants to feel that they fit in. I can hang out with everyone because I went to that school, and I hung out with rich kids, but I also in my neighborhood was middle class, and we were right next to a neighborhood that was poor, so I have that range.

And that helped me with my students. When I taught my first class at NCC, I realized, this is the right school for me, and Bethlehem population [00:35:00] is the right population for me because there is a little bit of everything, and there's a lot of Latinos, but there's also a lot of working class, middle class, and even people who could have gone to an Ivy League but wanted to save money and ended up at NCC, so I could relate. And I adapted quickly. Still, that's not to say it wasn't without any incident. I quickly realized that I was not white anymore, and little by little, I would write comments, poems, stories about my experience as un Latino en los Estados Unidos. I didn't know that 10 years later, that would

become a show that I ended up doing, which is what I'm known for now, and it's *The Trouble with My Name*, but we can talk about that a little later. But yeah, my experience in Bethlehem was very positive, and I love it here.

JS: [00:36:00] So you started teaching at NCC. And then, I guess, what were some of the adaptations you had to make when you started teaching here? Like, what were some big differences that you saw between teaching in Puerto Rico and then teaching at NCC? I know you mentioned the idea of whiteness is a big one. And so what were some of the things that you said you really loved? I know you mentioned, you know, the different populations, the mix of people, but did you find that you had a preference for one, that you missed certain things about Puerto Rico that you longed for? Did you -- what was that like adapting the next few years?

JA: It's interesting. I realized what it was like to be a minority, not just with the skin color but also ethnicity. For example, [00:37:00] there's an English department that I belong to, and there are great professors, they're wonderful. Usually I don't notice these things in Puerto

Rico because everyone else, for the most part, is Puerto Rican, and if it's blended, then it's blended, but to realize that, "Okay, I am the only Puerto Rican here. I am the only person of color in my department." I didn't feel bad about that, but I felt a responsibility. I'm like, "Oh, okay," so what happened was my first year teaching at NCC, I discovered that whether I wanted to or not, I was a role model to many of my Latinx students, both male and female. It was a male student who came up to me after one of the classes and said, "Professor, I just want to let you know that you're my inspiration." I'm like, "What? What did I do?" "Because you're a Latino male in a position of power [00:38:00] who has a PhD, and I want to be an educator, and I want to be like you." And I had never heard that in Puerto Rico because a Latino male is what most Latinos are.

So I didn't understand that, the power of that. And instead of shying away from it, I realized, "Okay, I've got to embrace this." I don't know if it's the advisors or word of mouth, but my classes are much more diverse than the average class. I mean, NCC is a very diverse college,



but in some of my classes, out of 24 students, you will have about 15 students of color, which is, you know, the majority of students are students of color, and those 15, most of them are Latino. And I realized that I was a voice for them, whether I wanted to be or not, so that I had to behave accordingly. And that meant being a good example, [00:39:00] being a role model, and showing them that it's possible because it's one thing to believe in something, but it's another thing to see it, and we need to see things in life in order to believe in them, no matter how faith-based you are.

Four years ago, when there was an election, and we had our first potentially female president, I remember my son asked me -- and at the time he was six years old, and he had been given a book of the US presidents, all -- first -- the 44 presidents, and he looked at the book, and he said, "Daddy, are girls not allowed to be president?" I was like, "Oh, no, no." You know, it was one of those uncomfortable questions. I said -- This was 2016. "No, actually, they are. Women are allowed, and we're most likely -- (laughs) -- mostly likely going to have a female president now."

[00:40:00] And he's like, "Oh. But it's never happened."  
I said, "Yeah, it's never happened." So then he said, "So  
they're not allowed." I'm like, "Okay."

You see? People are smarter when they're little. When you  
-- It doesn't matter what you tell people. What's more  
important is what you show them. You can tell your kid --  
Let's say you're a smoker. You can tell your kid, I don't  
want you smoking, it's bad for you. That's not the example  
you're giving. You have to walk the walk. You can't just  
say it. You have to show it. So going back to being a  
Latino leader, when students see a Latino in a position of  
power, earning awards, being recognized, they feel  
empowered, too, which is why in 10 years into my NCC  
career, I was blessed to be named Pennsylvania's Professor  
of the Year -- that was the highest honor that I have  
received in my career -- [00:41:00] and I knew that that  
was a wonderful thing for our community. And when I went  
to D.C. to receive the award, the, I think it was the  
President of the Carnegie Foundation said, "Javier, do you  
know that you are the first Latino to win this award?" And  
I was like, wow. In 40 years, no Latino had ever won it.

It made me feel good, and immediately it also made me feel sad because I'm sure I'm not the only good Latino professor in all of Pennsylvania, but it's a start.

You can choose to be bitter about not being properly represented. You can choose to have a victim mentality, or you could say, you know what, if I have to work harder, that's what I need to do. If I need to dress better, that's what I need to do. If I need to talk in a more articulate way, that's what I need to do, [00:42:00] but whatever I need to, I'm going to show people that I am excellent. And that's what I've chosen to do, and that's what I tell my students. I call them cookies. So that's -- I just hit the camera. That's what I tell my students. Listen, you have to be the best. Like Steve Martin says in his book, "Be so good that they can't ignore you." That's what you have to do, and be good even when they're not looking. When no one's noticing, still do the little things well. Don't cut any corners because that's the uphill battle that you're going to have to fight in order to achieve excellence. It doesn't matter if someone else

got it doing less of an effort. You can't look at that. You have to look at your own life.

JS: So you've talked a lot about how inspired your students have been to see you in power. And so I know you felt a sense of welcome by your colleagues when you first got there. Did that continue on? Did you feel well-supported by NCC staff, administration, community, or were there some challenges?

JA: [00:43:00] For the most part, there are always challenges. And remember, I have -- based on having heart surgery when I was little and thinking I was going to die and also having my mom tell me that I was really good looking, I have a really high self-esteem. So I don't think anybody can break me by saying something racist to me. And also because I experienced moments of racism later in life, I see them more as something that is amusing and that I have to defend rather than something that has marked me. If I had experienced racism, that kind of racism, when I was little, it would have been hard, and I would have had imposter syndrome.

But for example, I remember a professor who is actually a professor who claims he is very open-minded, I was speaking Spanish to a Spanish professor at NCC, [00:44:00] and this professor comes -- he's in the hallway, and he goes, "Blah, blah, blah, yo quiero Taco Bell." He says that, and I go, "Oh my god." Like you think that someone with a PhD would have the common sense not to say that. That's called a microaggression. Now that doesn't hurt me. I'm not going to go to HR about it, but I realized, wow, I guess there is some kind of problem with us speaking Spanish in public.

I taught a course at another college, and I was new. I was just a visiting professor teaching fiction writing, and I went to get my mail at the mailbox, and there is a combination lock to get your mail, and I remember being there, and actually it was -- I was dressed in a t-shirt and in shorts, so I was not -- Usually I'm dressed in a shirt or tie. [00:45:00] So anyway, I'm in a t-shirt, which changes things a little bit. And I remember someone, older white lady, saying, "Excuse me. This is for faculty only. You have to be faculty. You cannot be here." And I said, "Sorry, I'm just checking my mail." "Yeah, it's

faculty only! You're not supposed to be here!" And luckily I had my ID, so I showed her my ID that says I'm faculty. And she apologized. She said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry." And I said, "It's okay. It's okay. It's not your fault that I'm brown." I said it like that because every now and then, I like to cause trouble. *The Trouble with My Name* is also after my nickname, which is Troublemaker. And she's like, "No, it's not because of that. It wasn't because of that." I'm like, "Well, I don't see any other reason. I don't see any other reason because I have seen many colleagues dressed any way they want to, but there is one thing that is different for them."

So it is everywhere. I would say in the Lehigh Valley, it is not as prominent as it is [00:46:00] in other places, but discrimination based on the color of your skin is everywhere. Again, I choose not to be a victim, and that's why I decided that when I did my show, I was not going to portray myself as a victim. I was going to use humor, comedy, as a way to talk about this very difficult subject because racism is very difficult for everyone to talk

about. And if you look at it, in one way or another, we are all a product of a white supremacist society, so of course, everyone in one way or another has a racist world view, which we have to understand.

I had it. In Puerto Rico, when we learned about history, we learned that Christopher Columbus was a hero, that we were saved, that we were savages, and now they brought us religion, and they brought us culture, and of course, history is told by the victor. [00:47:00] So the history of the natives of Puerto Rico was not told properly, and the history of Puerto Ricans in the Lehigh Valley, if it's not told by Puerto Ricans or if it's not told by Latinos, will be incomplete, which is why it's great that this project is happening.

JS: So based on these experiences, so you mentioned it influenced your show, and it influenced -- Can you talk about some of your books and your poetry, things that you decided to publish? What went on behind your decisions to publish or not publish certain things? How did you know when the right time to come out with your show or to come out with a book was, I mean, in terms of balancing

everything that you're going through, that your family might be going through? A lot of your poems are about that teaching experience, about getting your name wrong, that kind of thing, [00:48:00] and beautifully written by the way.

JA: Oh, thank you.

JS: So can you talk a little bit about the timing of it? How did you know it was the right time? How did you know what to write? How did you know when you wanted to publish in English and Spanish, or maybe, like, your most recent novel to just publish it in Spanish? Can you talk about what went behind some of these ideas?

JA: That's a great -- I've gone back and forth with English and Spanish. The first few books that I wrote were in English because that was my academic language, and a good friend from grad school in Puerto Rico told me, "You are Boricua, and you write beautifully in Spanish. Why don't you publish in Spanish?" I'm like, "I've never thought about that. I guess I should." I wrote my first three or four books in English, and then I wrote a book that's called *Vidrios ocultos en la alfombra*, broken glass under the carpet. That was the first book that I wrote in Spanish.



[00:49:00] It was poetry. Most of the poetry that I wrote in Spanish was about the human condition and the time and the fact that we're all going to die. You know, fun stuff. And it was influenced by my English writing style, so it was not the typical Puerto Rican literature. It was more of a concise, raw, very, very precise writing, more of a Puerto Rican writer writing in an American style.

I did that for many years, but then when I moved to Bethlehem, I missed Spanish so much that I continued to write in Spanish, and that's when I started writing novels in Spanish. So I wrote *La Profesión más antigua*, which was about the corruption in university in Puerto Rico. That was not really liked in universities in Puerto Rico so much because of the controversy. Where's *Polvo*? Then my most recent one is *Polvo*, which [00:50:00] it's set in Bethlehem and in Puerto Rico. It goes back and forth, and it's a fun adventure about a guy who eventually becomes a murderer. Fun stuff. I had written another phenomenon of the English and Spanish. I wrote a novel in English, different, that became a movie in Spanish. The movie is *Miente*, so the movie with English subtitles, and actually we're going to

show that at the SteelStacks, and you can see that movie for free online.

But anyway, going back to this, I never wrote about identity until I was here in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. And I wrote about it little by little, but I never wanted to publish it because I thought it was -- "You know, that's my personal issue. I don't know if it's going to click with anyone." But then as it happens, in 2014, I think it was, [00:51:00] I wrote the poem, "The Trouble with My Name" because I had so many people who just -- I thought my name was kind of easy, Javier. You can say Javier, if you want to, but I got Jayvier, I got Xavier, I got Javiay, I got Jabbyray. I'm like, "Is this for real?" And then Avila? Forget about it. I got Avilar, Avilay, Avilia, Aliva, Alivay. Now I'm like, "Oh my god. People can't say my name." So I thought, well, I could get mad about this, but that's not going to help. What if I make it into something funny?

So I wrote the poem, "The Trouble with My Name," I think must have been six years ago, but I didn't do anything with

it. And I would be invited to colleges to do poetry readings or to talk about writing. Very serious poetry readings, because my poetry was so serious, [00:52:00] so I'd like to tell funny stories to kind of have the crowd have a good time before I gave them a very serious poem. I remember, it was my wife who told me, "You know what, people love your stories so much that you should do something with it." And at that time, somebody invited me to do a speech at a college in Pennsylvania. I think it was ESU. And it was last-minute. She said, "Listen, our keynote speaker bailed on us. We need a keynote speaker in three weeks. Can you do it?" And I said, "Well, this is a good chance." I said, "Yes, I can do it, but can I do whatever I want for an hour?" She said, "Do whatever you want. Read poetry, whatever you want."

I worked on the show, on what eventually became the show, and I delivered a very, very raw version of what became the polished show later on. [00:53:00] I gave -- I read some of the poems that I had already prepared, mainly the "Denied Service," which is the one about experiencing racism in Hazelton, someone calling me a foreigner because

I was speaking Spanish in public, not knowing that my dad fought for this country in the Army, and many of his friends died, and his best friend died in his arms. So "Denied Service" is a -- has a double meaning of, they were denying me service at the restaurant, and they were denying my dad's experience as a veteran and his service. So I wrote the poems, and I wrote many, many jokes. These jokes I had told in the classroom, but only in the classroom, not in public. I realized that what I do in the classroom ended up earning me a big award, so it was good what I was doing.

So when I finished that show -- it was an hour -- I remember a professor, a philosophy professor from Moravian, said, [00:54:00] "This is the best speech I've ever seen. You've got to take this on the road." I'm like, "Well, that's what I want to do." I spent the summer of 2016 practicing that show every day. I have rehearsed the show more than 300 times. It's ridiculous. It's annoying. If you live with me, it's annoying. I memorized it because in order to be a good public speaker, what I do is I memorized the first 10 minutes in such a way that even if I have a

nervous breakdown, a panic attack, I'm not going to forget anything. And in 2016, I did the first show at Penn State Lehigh Valley to a crowd of about 250 people because I went there three or four times to promote it to classrooms, to almost every classroom that I could. "Come see it." You have to hustle. You have to hustle. You have to want it.

[00:55:00] From there, to make a long story short, I have done 175 shows across 23 states, and we have done the show -- I think the numbers are over 55,000 people have seen the show. I've done in it Chicago in front of thousands of people. I did a big benefit in front of 1,000 people in the Lehigh Valley at the Zoellner Arts Center. Been to Princeton. I've been to Puerto Rico and did it in a huge crowd in front of my high school guidance counselor and my classmates and my school teachers, my third grade teachers. It's been all over. It's been an incredible experience, and it's because it's real, and I don't portray myself as a victim. I portray myself as someone who is learning and who has to laugh at it because we're all, in one way or another, we're all [00:56:00] ignorant of something. We have to realize it. We don't have all of the knowledge,

and we're learning, and I think people really identify with the show.

It's sad now that because of a pandemic, the show is going to be done, but it's going to be done mostly online. We don't have that face-to-face interaction. I won't get to -- for example, with the crowd, I take out a bottle of witch hazel or of bay rum, and I get a volunteer, and I put the witch hazel on them to say, "Oh, you're going to be healed now from everything." But we do what we can. We're still doing it and we're happy to do it.

JS: And have you noticed, I guess, different reactions depending on which state you're in? What was it like going back to Puerto Rico and performing in front of all your old teachers? I mean, it must have been very emotional.

JA: It was incredible. It was a celebration. [00:57:00] I remember I had a tour. It was not just one show. I had five shows, one each day. I remember that the day before the big, big show -- I mean I have -- the big, big show was at Sagrado Corazón, el Universidad del Sagrado Corazón. That's when we had a bunch of people. It was -- We had to do an overflow crowd. We did it a few times. I had to

relearn the show in Spanish, and I translated the entire show. And back then, I gave my Puerto Rican crowd a 90-minute show, so it was 90-minutes of the entire -- of all the jokes, but the jokes had to be different because it's almost like a guide as to if you move to the US, this is what you're going to face. You might have your neighbor from across the street think that you're the gardener when you're just mowing the lawn in your own house. And you might have someone say, "Go back to your country," when you are in the US, which is your country, stuff like that.

[00:58:00] But it was incredible. I cried in Puerto Rico in the middle of some poems. There's a poem about my grandmother who lived to be 100, mi Abuelita Venerana Rivera, and my cousins who share the same grandmother were there in the front row, and they were crying, I was crying. Somehow I kept reading the poem. So I cried like Demi Moore in *Ghost*. I cried pretty that day. I was like (wipes eye). It was incredible. In some states, it's more of a challenge. We have people like this in the front row, (crosses arms) saying "Oh, let's see what this guy is going to do," because they don't know, and they might think this

guy is going to tell us that we're racist or that we're backwards, or.

But I start the show with the story of my dad being a military man and going to fight for our country in 1952, the Korean War, and you know what? They identified right away. They go from this (arms crossed) to this (leans forward with chin on hand). [00:59:00] And they thank me, and many of them say, "I didn't know anything about Puerto Rico. Thank you for the history lesson. Thank you for the laughter." I don't mention anything political because even though anyone can obviously see if I have a political affiliation, I don't want to insult people. I want to bring people together because there is much more that we have in common. So if I can find those commonalities and we can explore them together, we realize that we really are a humanity that needs one another. So I really, really make an effort not to insult anyone, and I have not had anyone walk out or be angry. The only things that have happened that are negative happened before the show when they didn't know it. But as soon as they know me, nothing, nothing bad has happened, knock on wood, so.



JS: [01:00:00] That sounds very symbolic, right? As soon as they know you, the fear goes down. The anxiety goes down. The defensiveness goes down. And so, so in doing these shows, you're touring a lot, you're writing a lot. So while you are in Bethlehem, what are some of the spaces that you and your family have felt most welcomed, most comfortable? I know you mentioned, you're like, "Okay, cool, here's a spot for me to go eat. Here's some people I can talk to." So what would you say are the spaces in Bethlehem that you feel most welcomed and feel most comfortable in? Are there spaces that you feel like could be transformed or more accommodating to the Latinx community?

JA: Well I feel like -- It's interesting. The south side is such a blend because you have a huge Latino community, [01:01:00] and then you have Lehigh, and I feel like the connection is starting, but that there's a barrier there. You reach Lehigh University, and there's some kind of barrier. I like to cross both barriers and live in both worlds, but I would like the worlds to be one. So it would be interesting to have more integration. I know that they're doing their part, and they reach out to the

community, and they've worked with me several times. I've done my show at the Zoellner Arts Center twice, one for 1,000 Bethlehem school area students from fourth grade to twelfth grade, and one for the community, and we did a huge benefit at Lehigh, and we raised thousands of dollars towards hurricane relief. I did it -- Joseph Roe invited me to do it at a diversity symposium. But I would like to see more integration. I would like to see the community and the university to be one, [01:02:00] to be together.

But I love the south side. I love Main Street Bethlehem. I walk there at least twice a week. If I'm in the area, you will see me there. And some people, "Hey, Javier, como estas? How are you doing?" And I like now that you have a casa de mofongo, but I like all the restaurants and the history. I love to just walk at Nisky Hill, and I feel good there. I feel good that the Moravians were people who were forward thinking, and they first -- have one of the first integrated cemeteries in the country, and they educated women. And then back in the time, they were very progressive, so I like the Moravian philosophy. I like to take the ghost tours in October, and I feel very welcome at

my college at NCC. People are generally very nice, I mean, everywhere I go. [01:03:00] Of course, it helps that I am nice, too. I mean, I look at them. I force people to say hi to me. If I see someone with their headphones around, I'm like, "Hey, how are you doing? How are you doing?" They go, "Oh, okay." I'm like that. I will force you to say hi to me and enjoy your day because I will give you a big smile, and you will feel good about yourself.

But yeah, there are some spaces that could work on it of course, that I -- I just don't like to see the enmity or the people thinking, "Okay, this place is going downhill because these people have arrived." I think it's good to get to know these people and try to communicate with one another. Allentown is another example. There's parts of Allentown now that look like any huge city anywhere in the world, and a few blocks down, there's el barrio, and you would think, "Why can't this be more integrated,"

[01:04:00] not just a gentrification of it? Which happens. It's natural. You'll get all kinds of people saying, well, gentrification is bad because they're taking the authenticity out of the neighborhood, but then again other

people say, well, no one else was doing anything with this neighborhood, so it's a good thing that it happened. It depends. Every case is different.

But I just, I'll say that I think it's good for people to visit both sides and blend a little more. I'm an example of that. I'm a Latino married to a white woman. I have a whitetino child. If you just look at him, you will think he's a white boy, but he is half Puerto Rican. He's very proud -- I had a notification there. People, these are modern times. I had a notification. I touched my phone. Don't worry. It's all good. It's hard when [01:05:00] you're trying to teach your son what it's really like when you're not in Puerto Rico, so the best education for him is a trip to Puerto Rico, so he's been to Puerto Rico about seven, eight times, and he loves it. He knows that his name there is not Oscar. It's Oscar or Oscarito. And he knows that over there, I'm not Javier. I'm Quique because I'm Javier Enrique, and they call me Quique. And -- Anyone who calls me Quique, I know that's from before I moved to Bethlehem because here, no one calls me Quique. I don't, you know. I think to explain Q-U-E-Q-U -- no --

Q-U-I-Q-U-E, oy, dios mío, mira de eso. Quique? No. But I don't even know what we were talking about, but I've having fun doing this.

JS: So you mentioned your son, and I think, if it's okay with you, it's important to talk about him, too, [01:06:00] because I feel like many of us are in that space. A lot of us identify as sometimes half Puerto Rican, even though we're all one person, right? We are whole the way we are. So can you talk about -- and maybe this talking on his behalf, but, about him kind of identifying as half Puerto Rican? How have you seen him live out what it means to be Puerto Rican in Bethlehem?

JA: Well, he will -- it's funny. He was born in 2010, and he's 10 years old. He has mostly seen very positive representations of Puerto Rico, not like the stereotypes that some people may have. He does not have those negative stereotypes. Even when he went to old San Juan, and he saw all the stray cats, he was like, "How cool, look at all these cats!" [01:07:00] It didn't register that oh, these are cats who don't have a home. So he identifies Puerto Rico as something positive because I always talk about Puerto Rico with great love and nostalgia because that's

what we do when we move and we're away from home. We forget about all the traffic jams and the heat. And now, you know what? I've become a wimp because when I go there, and I -- as soon as I leave the airport, I go, "Oh my god, the humidity, this is awful. I can't breathe well here with this heat."

But anyway, he gave an oral presentation, I think, when he was in second grade, and he was practicing, and he had the Puerto Rican flag wrapped around his shoulders, and he says, "My name is Oscar Avila. I am --" however old he was. I think he was seven at the time. "I'm seven years old, and I am from Bethlehem, and I am Puerto Rican."

[01:08:00] And for him to say that, I go, "Oh my god."

Because in the story of American assimilation, many ethnicities are taught to hide their history and to erase their language, so that they can fit in, which is, I think, a tragedy when a grandmother cannot communicate with her grandchild because in the space of one generation, the language was erased. So even though it's hard, I want him to understand that you can be Puerto Rican and be American. You can be multilingual and still be American.

I speak Spanish, that's my first language. I speak English. I teach English. I speak French. I'm a little rusty, but when I go to Canada, I speak it a little better. And I actually wish I spoke more languages, like my good friend Illyana [01:09:00] who speaks five or six languages well, oh my god. I think it's a good thing. So, I wanted to embrace that, embrace the culture, embrace the food. So when he talks to his cousins about it and when we have people come over, I call it my white family because everybody's white except me, it's so funny. They don't notice that anymore. They don't -- At first, they would notice, but now they know that I'm going to bring the arroz con gandules or I'm going to make the fricasé de pollo de tostones. If they come here to visit, and I don't have that for them, they're like, oh. Like for Christmas, when I go over to Wilkes-Barre, if I don't bring the coquito, I'm not going to be allowed in. They're like, "Javier, where's the coquito?" I'm like, "Oh, coquito, I've got it in the car. It's there. Don't worry about it." Or the flan. The flan de queso que yo hago. Mmm. I don't make

it anymore because it's too much of a temptation. I've got to stay trim for the show.

[01:10:00]But, so my son is very proud. He knows. He understands that he has this culture and this cultural richness that he has to continue. He has a legacy, and he knows that because he's part of the show. The last poem that I read is the legacy that I want to leave behind. It's the story of his four great-grandmothers from both sides of the family, and the fact that it ends by saying, I am the future of America. When you see me, you'll see yourself. Meaning that what I want is a world where if you see anyone, white, Asian, Latino, Black, Middle Eastern, when you see that person, you can also see yourself. We're not there yet, but that's the world we want to live in.

And I think the younger generation -- [01:11:00] for example, my son goes to Spring Garden in Bethlehem, and his classroom is very diverse. You see the yearbook. You see all these names and all these faces, and every color is represented, and that's a good thing because they'll grow up familiar with other cultures, and I like that the



teachers there give assignments about other culture and bring pictures of food from your culture. I mean, ideally, they will learn of course they're influenced by their parents and grandparents, and there's going to be some division, but I think there's progress being made that has not happened in generations.

JS: And how do you feel about maybe what he's learning? You mentioned about leaving a legacy. And so, I'm wondering, [01:12:00] what is it he is learning about Puerto Rico, if there's anything that he's learning formally in his school or that's different from his actual experience going back and forth to Puerto Rico, talking to you about your childhood and your experiences. How is he picking up in Bethlehem what it means to be Puerto Rican if anything?

JA: I mean, that's heavily influenced by me. I don't know how much of it happens in the classrooms. I will say that there is a deficiency in the schools in general -- and I'm not blaming the teachers because the teachers are bound to the curriculum. They have to, and many of them are teaching to a certain test that they have to take, and they would love to do their own thing, but they can't. College professors have a little bit more leeway and can have more,

a little bit more freedom. So in a way, we're not bound by that. As long as teach certain things, I can bring in other material.

[01:13:00] So an example, I'm teaching all these poems to my son already, but I teach a poem by Pedro Pietri, and it's called "Puerto Rican Obituary." It is a remarkable poem about the Puerto Rican experience in New York a few decades ago when there was a massive migration of Puerto Ricans who moved to New York City in search for a better life, in search for the American dream, but they wanted to assimilate so much that they forgot to preserve their culture. So instead of being together, they were pitted against one another, thinking that there's only room at the top for one of them. And that's what happens a lot.

Actually someone told me, when I was doing the show, the first two shows, someone said, "Man, your show was great. Too bad John Leguizamo is doing the same thing." I'm like, "What do you mean?" They're like, "Oh, he's doing *Latin History for Morons*, and it's the same kind of show."

[01:14:00] And I'm like, "Oh yeah, he can do his show. I

can do my show. No one says to Seinfeld, 'Hey, too bad Sebastian Maniscalco is doing the same thing, observational comedy, a white man doing observational comedy.'" No. We can do it. We can exist. I saw Leguizamo's show. I met him. We spoke. Our shows are very different even though they are two Latinos talking about historical facts and making people laugh, but that's it. So there's still that mentality.

So anyway, going back to Pedro Pietri, I taught Pedro Pietri in my classroom, and it was the most popular poem that I taught because everyone, Irish, Polish, Italian, etc., identified with at one point their parents or their grandparents being treated a certain way when they were the new Americans, right? [01:15:00] And then a Latino man, 22 years old from Allentown, said, "Prof, that poem was a portrait of my family. I can't believe I had never read this man. I had never read about the Puerto Rican experience in school." Now I don't know if that has changed -- that was a few years ago -- but I found it very sad that this 22-year-old man went through all his life and

through most of his college experience, he was coming back, and had not read a Puerto Rican author.

I think it's our duty to teach to the audience that we have. If our school district, if the Allentown school district, is over 65 percent Latino, then we must make the curriculum reflect that reality. We must make the faculty reflect that reality. And even if it doesn't meet [01:16:00] the 65 percent number, at least make it 10 or 20 percent, not one percent, not two percent, because it helps. It doesn't mean that people don't learn African American literature if a Black professor is not teaching it. You can be white and teach African American literature, of course. But nothing replaces having a Black teacher. You know what? I never had a Black teacher. Even in Puerto Rico I never had a Black teacher. They were all white-looking Puerto Ricans. Most people in the US have never had a Black educator. They exist, but you don't get them.

And my son and I watch Key and Peele a lot. We love it. Have you watched the substitute teacher? I know it's a

parody about this Black teacher from the inner city  
[01:17:00] getting all these white kids and kind of  
changing their names. That's what happened in Puerto Rico.  
White teachers from the US changed Puerto Rican names, and  
they would say, Pedro, you know you're not Pedro. You're  
Peter. Jorge, you're George. They wouldn't just no, you  
want to assimilate, and they would do it here, too. They  
would not accept -- They would say, "That's too hard to  
say. I don't know how to say it." Well, you know what?  
That is in many ways a racist approach. Now, they're not  
bad people. We can't equate racism with being bad. It's  
just not having the knowledge.

Your name is everything. If you don't know the language,  
when you move to another country, and you have another  
culture, and you don't know the language, your personality  
changes. You don't want to speak that language because  
you're afraid you'll make a mistake, and they'll make fun  
of you or that it will be bad, which is why people  
assimilated in the past. The more people understand that  
having an accent is not a problem, [01:18:00] it means that  
you're adding to you arsenal, and that it means that you

have more than one culture, and it has nothing to do with your intellectual ability. Quite the opposite. Having an accent sometimes means that you have much more that you have to offer. The more people learn that, I think the better it will be.

But it takes time, and it takes a lot of understanding and a lot of mixing, not just the one time that you have your one Latino friend that you see every month. No. It's just -- you just look around. You go to a wedding. I went to my brother-in-law's wedding. There were 200 people in Philadelphia. There were 199 white people and me. You know, all these people are good people and they're having a good time, but I just wonder, wow, 200 people. They couldn't find in their lives the opportunity to have someone of color [01:19:00] other than me? And I was married to -- you know, I was in the family, so that's why I was. There was no friend, there was -- It's shocking sometimes how segregated we are even though we might claim that we're very progressive. We're still living segregated lives. And it still happens in the Lehigh Valley. I live in a section that is more of a white section, and now we're

getting a little bit more diversity, and people talk about it, people talk about it. "Oh, the neighborhood is changing." I'm saying, "Yeah, the neighborhood is changing for the better because now we're seeing different things." That's a good thing.

JS: Yeah, I hear you talking about this importance of representation, of diversity, and I'm also thinking of -- her name's Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

JA: Yes.

JS: And she talks about the danger of a single story, and so I'm hearing you kind of echo that. [01:20:00] So I'm wondering, is there, what are some of the Latinx movements you've seen in Bethlehem over the last few years? Have there been any where you are noticing the people come together within the Latinx community to fight for something in particular? And if so, have you been a part of that, or how have you felt the need to be part of that movement?

JA: Yeah, I've been a part of it. I've been in the Fé Foundation, which we give scholarships to young entrepreneurs. So we have these kids who are amazing, and they're 15 and 16 years old, and they go through an internship in the summers, where they work for a particular

company -- and we've partnered with a lot of companies in the Lehigh Valley -- and they get a great experience, and they know what it's like firsthand to be in business. We teach them how to present themselves, [01:21:00] anywhere from how to behave in an interview, what to wear, how to speak to someone from a different culture, and all kinds of innovations. So I'm a part of that. I'm very proud of that.

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of the Lehigh Valley, I'm involved with them. They actually organized the benefit where I did my show, and we partnered with schools in the Lehigh Valley, and we had a contest of which school can bring the most supplies, and it was Freedom High School. And their Spanish teacher, oh my god, they brought two truckloads full of supplies. And it was incredible. I'm also a part of the Hispanic Caucus in my college, and they do wonderful work. We've invited all kinds of artists.

[01:22:00] The last few years I've been the head of the Len Roberts Poetry Day at NCC, and I've made sure -- I invited Joaquin Zihuatanejo, who is an incredible poet who has this



wonderful piece called, "This is a Suit." Check it out when you get a chance. Joaquin Zihuatanejo.

And we're reaching out to the community. We're working with what we have, and lastly, what's another project that I've done? Well, I was part of the Pennsylvania Latino Convention here in Bethlehem, and I was, I was their keynote speaker. I provided the show. That was -- I think we turned Bethlehem into a Latin America, Hotel Bethlehem, for two or three days. It was incredible, and they were serving tostones. And I think it's a vibrant community, and I think it really is [01:23:00] a hard-working, wonderful community. And I love it, and I think people are appreciating it, all the contributions that we're making. So I'm happy to be a part of it, and I will continue to do it for as long as I can.

Now with the pandemic, it's harder, and I think it's really hard for me as a Puerto Rican. I'm a very, as you see, animated person. I'm always hugging, giving kisses, and now social distancing, so my kid's getting all the kisses.

He's like, "Daddy, okay, that's enough." I'm like (mimics kisses). But he loves it. He loves it.

JS: We have about five minutes left. Is there any other experience that you want to share that maybe we haven't asked directly? Or anything that you think is important for those that are looking in this archive and searching for answers, maybe not seeing certain history [01:24:00] in books and getting frustrated? Are there certain things you want to share with them?

JA: Well, I think that you -- when you're a pioneer in something, which many Latinx leaders are the pioneers -- like I remember going to an event in Lancaster. They were introducing the first Latino mayor of something, the first Latino president of this company, and they introduced me as the first Latino Pennsylvania Professor of the Year. When you're a pioneer, you have a responsibility, and you're not doing -- whatever you're doing, you're not doing it only for yourself. I remember years ago, when I was -- we were walking downtown, and our son is walking in front of us, and he has a certain walk. I can't replicate it because I'm sitting down, but he's got a walk with a swing, and I turn to my wife, and I say, "Look at him. [01:25:00] Look

at that walk. Who does he think he is?" And she said, "Honey, that's exactly the way you walk." And I realized, "Yeah, I have that swing. This is the way I walk."

The purpose of this story is not to make fun of my walk. It's that children are absorbing everything, and everything that you do, they will imitate, they will emulate. If you portray yourself -- If you live your life with the mentality that the world is against you, your child is going to absorb that and think that. However, if you think, you know what? This is a learning opportunity. A moment of this rumination is a learning opportunity for you to come out on top and become more united as a country, perhaps even become friends with the person that perhaps thought something of you. It is your responsibility to do that and [01:26:00] to move the new generation forward, but you have to do it by living a life of dignity and respect.

Now why do I do that? Before my son was born, I lived that kind of life because I, at my father's funeral, my mother said, "I want you to live a life that your dad would be proud of, and everywhere you go, I want you to make him

proud." And that's what I've done. Now I do it for my son. There's always someone there that you can make proud of. And I think that's my message to the community of young Latinas and young Latinos everywhere is live a life that your ancestors would be proud of and that your children, eventually when you have them or if you have young children, that your children will emulate. And aim high because this thing about thinking that there's only room at the top, that's a lie. There is room for a lot, [01:27:00] and as long as we stay united, we can do it together, and that's -- there's not a more beautiful thing than doing it as a community.

JS: Thank you so much. That's a really wonderful way to end this. And I think it's important for us to know that it's not about competing with each other. It's about making space, so thank you for showing that in your life and sharing that in this interview. I'm excited for people to hear what you have to say and to live into that as well, so thank you, thank you.

JA: Thank you so much.

JS: And just a few follow-up questions, and I know it's a pandemic, so it's hard to mail things or share things, but

if there's anything -- do you have any documents or photos or anything you would want to share for the archive? Otherwise you can mail it, or we can wait until the pandemic's over, and if there's something you want to contribute to the library, the Bethlehem room, that you think is important, we would love to --

JA: [01:28:00] Yeah, I can share some of the books. Some of the post -- I have a lot of posters. Is this still recording?

JS: Yes.

JA: I don't know if you can see on the wall, this is like the shrine wall. There's a bunch of posters. I can send you some of the posters and I can -- We have these books -- We have some of these books in the library. This one is a brand new cover of *Different*, so I can send this one. Of course, *The Trouble with My Name*, we'll do that. I have pictures of my dad that I can -- We have them electronically. On our website, we have a bunch of pictures of my dad in the uniform serving, but that doesn't pertain to Bethlehem. But yeah, I'll send whatever you need. I'm happy to contribute.

JS: Yeah. It's whatever you are happy to contribute for the Bethlehem room for viewers that want to know more about

your history or in general the history of the Latinx community here. And then did we miss anything at all?

[01:29:00] Is there anything else you want to state?

JA: I don't know. This is much better than the Zoom meetings about whether they're going to reopen or not. This is much, much better. Yeah, this is good. Yeah, I'm glad we have this technology because if the pandemic had happened 30 years ago, I don't know.

JS: Yeah, forget it.

JA: At least we have this.

JS: Yeah. And my last question for you is, do you know of any others that you think we should contact and interview if we're able?

JA: I think I may have mentioned Teresa Bonaté and Ricardo Orange because they have been in the community for decades, so they can really talk about what it was like. I think she mentioned information about what it was like to buy a house when you were Latino back in the day, and I think that's interesting because she really experienced a lot of discrimination back in the day. [01:30:00] She said, "Things are very different now. Like you don't know what you don't know what it's like, what it was like then." I

have a friend who's a math professor. His name is Alex Rolón. He's really nice, and I have his number. I could text you his number. He's a little older than I, maybe a couple years older, but he's lived here longer. He's lived here maybe more than 20 years. So he's good, and he's very, he's got a lot of stories. Even though he's a math professor, he's all about social justice and equity, so he'd be a good person. I don't know who -- If I think of someone else, it would have to be from Bethlehem, right? Or from the Lehigh Valley?

JS: Or someone that has spent part of their life in Bethlehem that can illustrate what it's like.

JA: Yeah, definitely.

JS: Well thank you so, so much for sharing [01:31:00] your time. I know you're incredibly busy, probably even in this pandemic. So, it's --

JA: Yeah, but this is worth it.

JS: Yeah. We're very grateful for you to be a part of this project, and yeah, thank you so much. I'll be in touch with you about your transcript. Usually once I send this out, it takes about a week to two weeks. We'll send it to you, and you would just review that. If there's anything

you want us to change for that, for the archive, we'll go ahead and do that, so you'll be able to have full control over what's shared.

JA: Sounds good. Sounds good. Do you need anything else? Any --

JS: I think that's it. That's it. I wish we had so much more time to find out more, but I'm so grateful to you for what you've shared.

JA: All right. Well thank you so much, Janine. You're great, and good luck with everything, and let me know if you need anything else. Just give me a call or text or email. All right?

JS: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

JA: Okay, thank you, have a great day.

JS: You, too. Take care.

JA: Bye-bye.

END OF AUDIO FILE