

RobledoVivian_20210127_video

JAVIER TORO: Okay, my name is Javier Toro. And I here with Vivian Robledo-Shorey to talk about her life and [00:05:00] experiences as a community member and leader in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as a part of the *Voces de la Comunidad* project. Our project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. We are meeting on Zoom on January 27, 2021. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today. I know your schedule is very difficult to have some free time for this kinds of event. But I really appreciate it, Vivian.

VIVIAN ROBLEDO: Thank you. Well, this is --

JT: You're welcome.

VR: -- important.

JT: Oh, yes.

VR: And I feel --

JT: It is. It is. Yeah.

VR: I feel like I'm not worthy. I'm too young. (laughter)

JT: Oh, no, no. That's doesn't matter. You have a lot of knowledge and experience in the community. That is very important. Okay, to start, can you please state your full

name and spell it for me?

VR: Okay, so it's Doctora Vivian Robledo. I don't use the Shorey anymore. And [00:06:00] it's spelled Vi-- V-I-V-I-A-N. And last name, R-O-B as in boy-L-E-D as in David-O.

JT: Thank you. Would you please share your birthdate?

VR: August 3, 1968.

JT: For the purpose of this interview, how do you most comfortably identify yourself, as Puerto Rican; Latina; Hispanic; Latinx; or any other way?

VR: I prefer to use Puerto Rican.

JT: Puerto Rican.

VR: Yeah.

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

VR: Yes, I do.

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

VR: Yes, I do.

JT: Do you consent the Latinx archive using your interview for educational purposes [00:07:00] in other formatting,

including films, article?

VR: Yes, I do. You're breaking up.

JT: Okay. On, I'm sorry.

VR: Little bit, yeah.

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

VR: Yes, I do.

JT: Okay. Thank you. All right, but let's start with the first question. Will you tell me about your early years of your life? Describe your childhood.

VR: Oh, the good old days. So, I was born and raised on the South Side of Bethlehem. Grew up across the street from Donegan Elementary School to first-generation Puerto [00:08:00] Rican mother; father was not married. They weren't married anymore that I remember. They divorced when I was still an infant. So I grew up in the house with my mom; my grandmother; my tía, Betty; and my Uncle Mike; and Betty's three sons on Fourth Street. And I do have half brother, sister in Bethlehem as well. But I didn't grow up with them. So I came to know them as my brother

and sister much later in life. So I grew up as an only child pretty much with these three cousins that were like my older brothers, who tormented me. (laughs) They were a lot older than me. But I remember really good times on the South Side of Bethlehem. I remember hanging out on the porch -- on the stoop of the porch with my friends that lived on the left side and on the right side or apartments on the one side; and [00:09:00] still friends with them today; and just the great stories of hanging outside, riding bikes, no -- very little technology, going down to Saucon Park to go swimming, going across the street to Donegan to play kickball in the hard -- blacktop, and just being really grounded in family and good friends -- and all kinds of friends. The South Side is known for its immigrant population. So there were Portuguese, African American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, and we all hung together. And many of us went to Donegan. There were some that went to Holy Infancy. It almost felt like no cares in the world. Never really [00:10:00] understanding that, since I live with my aunt and my mom didn't have her own place, that there were some financial concerns. So she was a factory worker. My aunt was a factory worker. They

worked down the street -- or on Fountain Hill, I think it was. The factory was in Fountain Hill. And would bring some things home to sew and to iron to make extra money. I remember that clearly. And growing up in a home that was very diverse, because my uncle was German or Dutch or both, World War II Vet. And so people find it funny that I grew up not only watching *novelas* in Spanish, but *Hee Haw* and *The Lawrence Welk Show* and *The Jeffersons* and what's the other one, *Sanford and Son*. So it was so [00:11:00] mixed. And the music that I grew up with was so mix, it was *salsa y merengue*. And I don't remember a lot of *bachata* when I was younger. So I don't know if the -- if it became stronger as I got older. And *Soul Train* and soul music and R&B and top 40, so I felt like I had a really great grounding in different cultures and just knowing what it meant to be Puerto Rican. My grandmother was there, this extended family. We, talking about Puerto Rico and the grandfather that was orphaned in, *era de España* [00:11:46], and the mother that was definitely *Taíno* blood and talked about the rough times that her mother talked about with [00:12:00] the Spaniards that came. And then the little bit I got to know of my father's family, and

more so now that I'm older... And going to school at Donegan, it was just an amazing experience. I was a crossing guard. And I was in gymnastics. And I used to get to come home from lunch -- for lunch. So that was pretty cool. I didn't have to eat school lunch all the time, until I got older. Then I wanted to hang out. But I got to come home and eat our food. And then when I got to Broughal, another amazing experience, I remember going back to Donegan. The gym teacher, Mr. Guerrero was his name. He thought I was really good at gymnastics. And they got together and the school paid for me to be a year in Parkettes. So I couldn't afford that. And I remember doing [00:13:00] that for a year and not going back. We didn't have the money. I'm sure my mom would have found the money, had I really, really wanted to do it because they always found a way; work extra hours and do whatever. But they found a way. And that was an amazing experience to be a part of Parkettes for a year. And then Broughal, I got to play volleyball, do -- be a wrestling manager, cheerleading. So I was involved in a lot of stuff growing up. And my mom didn't let me walk a lot. So she drove me everywhere. There was always this worry, *la nena, la*

negra, don't let her walk. Don't let her be by herself. It's dangerous. That kind of stuff. But she forgot I grew up with boys as cousins. So *yo era peleona*, though.

[00:13:52] I used to like to fight when I was at Donegan. It grew out of me as I got older. But I [00:14:01] would have never thought then that I'd be in the position that I am now. But Broughal was another great experience; same, like the same family, feeling with kids, and your community. And everybody walked, pretty much. Then I went to Freedom. That I had a different experience. Not that I didn't like Freedom. I played volleyball. I was an athlete. I can't say it was a bad experience. But I think it was the first time that I actually realized that we didn't have money when I went there. There was kids who were driving themselves to school. There were big homes. I became friends with people who lived in really nice homes with pools. And so I think that was my first experience with maybe we weren't rich (laughs) because we were so rich in every other way that I never really thought about the money [00:15:00] part. And like I said, my mom would do whatever she had to do for me to have the experiences that I needed to have. But you felt the difference coming from

the South Side to Freedom High School. But I still had good friends there and played volleyball. My mom made sure that she got the money so that I could play what they call club volleyball because everybody played this extra volleyball so that you can stay sharp and be good enough to make the team. So I did that and camp. And so, it was just an amazing childhood. There was always things like fighting and arguing and things that were happening in the community. But I always felt that the community looked out for each other, back then.

JT: (pause) Okay. [00:16:00] That experience with the community and your family, that strong ties that the family have and living with extended members of your family together, how that really made you go through the situation that you encountered at Freedom?

VR: What I know now, as an adult, I feel that because I had such good grounding with family and who I was and with -- I had a really good friend who I'm still best friends with, Cindy; African American. Her family, very close. They became my extended family. I don't think I ever felt like an outcast at Freedom because I was able to play [00:17:00] volleyball, I got good grades, I was involved. And I don't

recall ever being involved in honors classes or anything like that. I feel that I didn't know about those things. I did vo-tech. So I think that I never understood that feeling of what it meant until I got older. And I started thinking back about -- on experience now. I was experiencing microaggressions back then. Or I was pretty different than the other people. And sometimes, I was made to feel that. But most of the times, no. Most of the times, it was a good experience. But I think it was because my family experience was grounded. And I knew who I was. And that wasn't shaken, ever. I do remember never really having someone talk to me about college too much. I was told that maybe community college would [00:18:00] be the best route. I did apply to East Stroudsburg University. And thankfully, I got in. And that's where I went. I didn't shop around for colleges. I didn't think bigger than PA and local, even though I've always felt like I didn't want to stay in Bethlehem; that I wanted to branch out. I wanted more experiences. So I did go to ESU. But I really believe that family and community grounding is what helped me stay the course and do what I needed to do to finish high school.

JT: (pause) Okay, can you talk a little bit about that experience in college? What happened? You went to East Stroudsburg. And then what?

VR: Yeah, so I went to East Stroudsburg University. And there were some friends [00:19:00] that had gone there a couple years. They were a couple years older than me that were there. So they weren't friends-friends that I hung out with in Bethlehem before that experience. But they became that afterwards. When I got to ESU, that was... I played volleyball too. So I went in the summer so that I could start training. And it was eye-opening because although my family was from Puerto Rico, I was not one of the kids that got to go to Puerto Rico every summer. I had friends that their family, every summer, school's over, they sent them to Puerto Rico. I asked my mom about that because I wondered -- always wondered why I didn't. I didn't get that experience. And she said, well, she didn't have the money to do that. And most of the family had come back here -- had come [00:20:00] to Bethlehem or to New York. So they weren't there. There were some. But she was also very tight with me. It was always like her and me. And I was her only daughter. And so she was not big on letting

me go anywhere without her. So I think that was part of it, too. If she couldn't go, then I wasn't going. So she wasn't sending me with other family members. So I didn't get that experience. So when I went to ESU and met people from other states and from other countries, I was like, "Wow, Bethlehem is tiny. I need to get out of just that experience. I need to branch (laughs) out. And maybe I won't go back to Bethlehem." Interesting enough, I went to ESU as a computer science major because I went to [00:21:00] vo-tech and I was learning coding. And I liked it. And I think you froze, Javier.

JT: (pause) Yeah, you hear me?

VR: Yeah. You were frozen for a little bit.

JT: Oh, okay. Sorry about that.

VR: I didn't know if it was still recording. So I didn't know if I wanted to come back to Bethlehem when I had that freedom at East Stroudsburg. At vo-tech, I had taken computer science and coding. The teacher there pushed me in that he wa-- I was good. But when I got to ESU and had to take all those math courses and computer sci-- I was like, "Oh, this is not me." So I switched from computer science to math. And I was like, "Yeah, I can't do this

either." And then I went to economics. And that social science part of it is what I liked. And I graduated with a BA in [00:22:00] soci-- in economics. I was involved in the Black Student Union. I was involved in the Latino Student Association. I became a little sister to a fraternity. So I took advantage of everything I could take advantage of at ESU. But when that finished, I had to come home because there wa-- I didn't get a job right away. And I came back to Bethlehem. I remember searching for a job. And that was May 1990 I graduated and came back. I remember looking for a job and crying because I couldn't find anything that was worth getting involved in. But at the time I had -- I was dating a basketball player who graduated and got a contract with a team overseas. So I got to go with him to Cyprus. And I spent some time there. And I got to go to [00:23:00] Portugal. And I got to go to Iceland. And Puerto Rico, he went for a year and played in Puerto Rico; and it was just these amazing trips that he exposed me to; and these beautiful countries that there's no way I would have been able to afford to go to myself. And then we drifted apart and stopped dating. But I came back and still wasn't able to find a job right away. And

then the Health Bureau had a job opening. So that was my first taste of working for the community and with the community. I became a -- an HIV/AIDS counselor and Latino Educator. So I was able to work with students doing education about HIV and AIDS. I took the -- got the certification for phlebotomy and was doing HIV/AIDS testing. And [00:24:00] that was an amazing experience too. I would have never thought about public health as something that I was interested in. But I did that for a year. And the main thing I didn't like about it is that you did your own -- you were contracted. So you had a 1099. And you had to pay your own taxes. And at 20-something years old, I wasn't that (laughs) disciplined. So I ended up owing taxes like, "No, I can't do this. I need a job that takes out my taxes." And I interviewed for a admissions counselor position at ESU. And I got it. Interesting enough, before that, I think Jose Rosado had applied for it. And I think he got it. But he turned it down. So it was meant for me to have it. (laughs) I don't know if he knows that. I ended up getting the job. And I worked for [00:25:00] ESU for three years. And I was the Latino liaison. So I did all the minority recruitment for

ESU in high-Latino areas; so Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Erie, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Allentown, Bethlehem, East End, Reading. So that, again, working with students in the communities, not only Bethlehem, but getting to meet kids that were like me everywhere I went was just an experience that I'm so thankful that I had. But I remember vividly going out to Pittsburgh for a minority recruitment fair. So all of us were there from the 14 state schools together. We would do it, these things together. And I'm meeting kids. And a lot of them are saying, "Yeah, I'm not going to college. I'm only [00:26:00] here because I got out of class. No coun-- nobody's ever talked to me about college." And that hit me -- struck me. And there was, at the time, Bloods and Crip issues out in the area. I think it was Red Bags that we had. And kids were leaving the Red Bags because they had to walk through Blo-- Crip territory. So they didn't want to be with these Red Bags. And I was like, "You know what? I can't. I got to go back to college. I need to be able to help kids navigate the system." I didn't have anybody who really helped me. Even though my mom and my aunts and everybody was supportive, they didn't know anything about college. So it was like,

"*Pues sí*, you want to go? Go. If you don't want to go, there's jobs, *secretaría*, all kinds of stuff." So I was like, "No, I got to go back." So I remember going -- coming [00:27:00] back. And I think was '9-- it was '94, '95 school year. And I started applying to counseling jobs -- counseling programs. And I got accepted to NYU for their counseling program, amazing program. I left the job because I asked would they let me leave and come back? And they said, "No, it's a two-year program. Couldn't do that." So I left and moved to Jersey City. And then to Brooklyn. I met my now ex-husband. And we lived together in Brooklyn. But here's this Puerto Rican girl from South Side Bethlehem. *De nada*, that's how I felt at in big city New York, at a school like NYU. Everybody was totally amazed that I was at NYU. I got a really good scholarship, although [00:28:00] it was nowhere near enough to go. I took out a lot of student loans that I would advise kids today, go to Kutztown, unless you're getting more money than what I did because to pay to live there until I got a job, I had to take out student loans to help cover room and board that I'm still paying today for those loans. But it was a good experience. I lived there. I didn't want to

come back. And I'm sure that you spoke to Iris Cintron. And if you haven't, you will. She was a mentor to me. And my family knew her growing up. And I remember clearly graduating, working in New York, happy, don't want to come back to Bethlehem. And Iris Cintron calls, "Vivi, I heard that you have your (laughs) counseling degree." "Yes, Iris, I do." "Well, there's a position open. And I think you should apply." "I [00:29:00] don't know if I want to leave. I like it here. And I --" "Pues, you know, we got to give back. And we got to take care of the people and the places that gave to us. And I really think you should apply." So I applied. And I got the job. So I came home. (laughs) I took a pay cut. But I got home. I came back. And I've been here ever since. And that's 22 years now. And that was Broughal Middle School. (pause) Yup.

JT: (pause) I remember those Broughal years. I believe I -- that's when I met you. (laughs)

VR: Yes, I think so.

JT: Broughal, yes, that was quite a journey that you got so far with your life. At least you was able to travel around. That was one of your goals, that you want to visit other places. You was able to study out of Bethlehem sta-- out

of Bethlehem. [00:30:00] And then Iris made you come back.

VR: Yes, she did. (laughter) And I'm glad that she did. I'm glad. She was absolutely right.

JT: Yeah. And then this young woman coming back to her hometown in the schools, how was that experience? And how prepared was you to do that?

VR: I remember being... I came back in October. I started October '98 -- (inaudible) January, February. And I was five months pregnant. And I remember walking into Broughal five months, almost six months pregnant. And girls started fighting. And I was standing there. And they broke them up. And [00:31:00] they were like, "Vivian, take this one to your office." And I'm like, "Okay, I guess I'm working right away. This is welcome." You know, *bievenido*. And I sat with that girl. And we had such a great conversation. I got to understand what her exp-- life experience was so far and what the beef was about. And I was like, "I'm going to like it here." I think this is going to be a great experience. And I became step team coach. We had an amazing step team. That step team was number one everywhere they went. We stepped in New York. We stepped in Philadelphia. We stepped in Reading. Everywhere we

went, they were the best step team. In fact, I'm actually trying to set up a Zoom with some of them now to reminisce and talk about what was so important about the step team that helped you get through your middle [00:32:00] school years because as much as I helped them get through, they helped me work because I looked forward to that time so much with them? And I became the volleyball coach. I think I was there six years -- six, seven years as a school counselor. That was family too. That was like an extension to the community in Bethlehem. We were close. We had a connection with the kids. The best thing was that since I grew up on the South Side, many of their parents were friends or I knew them in some way. So there was a level of respect right away that a lot of people don't get when they get into a job. You have to earn all of it. I can't say that I earned it -- all of it. Well, I would say I earned it because we were family before that, growing up [00:33:00] together. And they knew I would do right by them in school. So that little six to seven years were great. And like Iris does in Iris fashion, at about five years in, she me llamo okra vez. [00:33:17] And she was like, "You know, you've been a counselor for a while. We

need principles." (laughs) I'm like, "Okay, what does that mean, Iris? What do I need to do?" And she was like, "Well, there's this fast track principal training program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. You should apply." So I was like, "Okay, I'll apply." I did that program and got my certification in 2006. And I applied for a couple jobs. And the main one I wanted was the [00:34:00] principal of the alternative school, which was Career Academy. And they didn't feel that I should get it; that they needed someone else with more experience because there are tougher kids and all the nonsense that people think you need. Here's this little Puerto Rican female and these tough, hardcore kids. We need somebody else that's going to be stronger. Okay. There was a half-and-half job. It was half instructional support, half assistant principal at Fountain Hill. So I got that first. And I did that for three months. And the district called and said, "Hey, remember that principal job you wanted? Do you think you still want to do it?" (laughs) And at first, I was like, "No, I'm going to stay here." And they were like, "No, I think you should do it." So I did that and became the principal of the alternative school for the -- until they

closed, [00:35:00] which was three years. We had a good three years. Again, I -- the kids were from -- mainly from the South Side, unfortunately. But fortunate for me because I think I was -- we were meant to be together in that place. I was some of their school counselor when they were at Broughal. Now I'm their principal, able to get a second chance at molding and guiding and teaching self-advocacy and love of culture for them. And when we closed, it was sad. I still talk to a lot of them. They're doing great. So I'm also looking to reunite and have a discussion about what it meant to them to have that experience in the school district. So I can't complain. I [00:36:00] have had really good career. And then from there, I went to Liberty for a year as an assistant principal. And then when Iris retired, or was planning to retire, and there's that phone call again. (laughs) Vivi, (laughs) thinking that you may be good for this position, if you are interested, I want to let them know. And she did. And I moved over to Central Office as supervisor for student and community engagement, which wasn't the name of her job. But they ended up splitting her job. And someone else did the federal grants. And I got to do the minority

affairs piece of her job. And then today, I'm the Director of Student Services and Minority Affairs.

JT: I really want to talk a little bit about that because the way I see, you are part of a group of [00:37:00] women that are part of our community and have been strong leadership in the school district. Let's start it when we -- with Sergia Mannes, Iris Cintron, and then you. Yeah. How do you see that position? How do you see your -- being your responsibility with the community in that particular position?

VR: Wow. Yeah, I'm definitely standing on the shoulders of giants, Sergia Mannes and Iris and Mary Colon and Doris Correll. And I'm -- probably missing some. But they definitely molded me. And Iris was more than just a mentor. She was a sponsor. People don't realize that mentorship, people teach you the ropes and they help you learn the system. But a sponsor pulls you in. When they see opportunities for you, they're like, "Oh, yeah, I have [00:38:00] somebody." And they make sure that your name is thrown around in the right crowd. So I'm blessed to have had them in my life; and still. I still call them for guidance and to talk through things, all of them. And so

here I am now. I feel when I was supervisor of student and community engagement, I feel even -- I was still very connected to community work. This position, not as much unless I make it happen. Technically, the director of student services deals with student discipline and a lot of higher-level management stuff. But for me, I need to get -- I need to make sure that part of that time is still visiting schools and talking to families and the outside of because [00:39:00] of discipline. So the minority affairs part allows me to still do that and have conversations with kids. And when COVID hit in March, when they shut down, my first reaction was so what are we going to do in the community? So I, right away, joined forces with dining services. And how are we going to feed kids? And who are the community restaurants that are going to give us food? And organize that with a partner in my office. And, "Oh, you can't get in touch with that family? Okay, I'll go knock on the door." And here we are in the middle of a pandemic. And a few of us are knocking on doors with masks and everything. But I felt that that's where I needed to be; not in an office, not figuring out the big picture and the plan and... I needed to be in -- on the ground,

[00:40:00] boots on the ground. And luckily, I was allowed to do that.

JT: (pause) All right, thinking about what you mentioned earlier, the conversation that when you graduate from high school, okay, college really wasn't the option for you. You were thinking about it. But like you said, "Okay, you go, you go. You're not, that's okay. You get a job anywhere." You probably was maybe first-generation --

VR: Yup.

JT: -- college in your family? Okay. Taking director experience in that was all those time that you have in the school district right now, do you see that that continue to happen in our community? Or that have to change a little bit, or no?

VR: I think it's changed in a lot of ways. But it still happens. I would be lying if I said that it doesn't happen. I've had kids tell me that they -- not that they weren't [00:41:00] advised that they shouldn't go. But there wasn't a whole lot of motivation or encouragement to go to college. So it still happens. I just don't think it happens as much as it did back then. And I think partly, kids know more now. They have a lot of ways of finding out

information on their own. So that is helpful with college. And I think there are more options now too. So you don't have to. Even though I had -- my mentality at the time and my family was, "Okay, great if you can go to college. But if you don't, you could always find a job." There were jobs then. It wasn't for a lack of -- not wanting an education, but understanding that well, maybe, it's not for you to go. I [00:42:00] think now the difference is that there are more options than just college or -- and military back then. That was never an opt-- I didn't want to go to the military. But it seemed like military and work were the big push then. But now there's college. We pushed kids so much to college in the middle there that we really need trades now. So that has risen up again as something -- as a really good option for kids that pays really well. And I think that more families are more aware. I think we're on top of it better that we expect that we talk to kids about college and about other things so that they have choices, more so than when I was in high school.

JT: (pause) Okay, Vivian. Let's go back to your early years.

[00:43:00] (laughs) Yeah, when you was a young woman, a teenager, how was the, *el barrio*? How was the neighborhood

for you? Places that you hang out, what was available for the youth when you growing up in Bethlehem?

VR: Right. So remember, I said my mom was very tight with me. So I wasn't allowed to go to a lot of places. There was a Boys and Girls Club. I wasn't allowed to go (laughs) there. So I did whatever Donegan had for after-school or anything like that. I could hang out with my friends there. I can hang out. We did so much on the block, like roller skating on Fourth Street, bike -- riding bikes. I remember my cousin, Jose, when he would... He lived on Aaron Street. So I was allowed to go there as long as they knew I was going. So I could walk there. [00:44:00] And we would ride bikes down to Saucon Park up South Mountain. If my mom knew then that -- what we were doing, I would have been in a lot of trouble. But I wasn't by myself. I was with him. We rolled around all over Bethlehem on our bikes. It was interesting though when I talk to other people. We didn't really leave South Side too much to hang out anywhere else. I didn't hang out in South Terrace, which is what it was called then. I didn't cross over to Pembroke, even when I was older in high school. I hung out a little bit there but sneaking. My mom didn't know I did

that either. And it was the biggest deal to take the bus to Allentown or Hamilton to go shopping. That was my thrill for the Saturday to be able to do that. So I didn't go far. But you felt like you can hang out until there [00:45:00] was -- it's no joke, when the light -- streetlights came on, you better be on the porch and nowhere else. But we were able to play around in that area. And so I played a lot on Donegan's property. And I remember my grandmother sneaking over there to catch us playing in the back because we weren't allowed to be in the back because that's where the woods wa-- were. And you can see the deer that will come. And she would sneak around and yell at us and make us come to the front. I don't remember, at least, feeling unsafe hanging out on the South Side. I remember there were people who sold drugs and stuff like that. But I never remember fearing them. And I remember a few times walking down -- there was apartment buildings across the street down further close to the William Street. And [00:46:00] I would want to go sneak over there and be told by the older guys and girls like, "Go home. You don't need to be hanging out here," and going home. So I don't remember feeling unsafe hanging out

there. (pause) I remember block parties though. There were some of those. I remember some dances. Holy Infancy would always have a dance. And there was times where it was -- they would sneak me in. I remember, God forgive us now, we lied and said I was a relative that came from out of town so that I can go to the one dance. (laughs) And having my own birthday parties in the park... And we had a driveway and a garage. And hanging out there with the keg of birch beer and some food [00:47:00] and music in the garage and hanging out. There's experiences that my kids didn't get to have like that.

JT: (pause) Yeah, those are the good old days. (laughs)

VR: Yeah, it was fun. Yup, it was fun.

JT: And how would you see, specifically South Bethlehem now, how do you see South Bethlehem moving to?

VR: I see some of the stuff that they're trying to do. I forget what it's called, four corners or international area. And I think they're good stuff. I get concerned with some of the gentrification that's happening. Some of the families that have had to move out. But I think that there's still enough people that understand the importance of that history that tried to maintain it as much as

possible. [00:48:00] I go to my aunt's; still has the house that's still across the street from Donegan. And it feels different. It doesn't feel as community as it did, even though people are still friendly and say hi to you when you come by. But I think society has changed so much that it's just changed the feeling. We're not as trusting as we used to be of each other. I don't see kids hanging out as much. And maybe there's not as many kids there as there was when I was younger. So the feeling is different. We don't really trust each other as much. We avoid each other. I mean, when I was growing up, the neighbor would tell you if you're too far from the house, that they weren't going to call -- tell on you. And that was okay. (laughs) You knew you had to get home. [00:49:00] And now I feel like if you said that to someone, they would probably say, "Ah, mind your business. It's none of your business what I'm doing." So it's just a different time. And I don't see that as, "Oh, it's horrible. And these people are mean." I just see it as the times have changed. And so the experience and the people have changed with it. And that's unfortunate. But they're making their own experiences in a different way.

JT: (pause) Okay, Vivian, we are getting to the end of the interview. Like I said, I don't want to take too long of your time. If anything else that you want to add to this conversation, you think is missing that you want to let us all know...?

VR: I think this is an amazing project. I hope that you are able to get more [00:50:01] of the community that still lives there or is still alive. I have mentioned to you my aunt, my mom because that -- those are stories. My grandmother passed. And there's so much I wish I would have recorded and still had and remembered about her life and when she came here from Puerto Rico so that you're able to capture different generations of Latinos -- Latinx from the -- you only doing South Side or is it all of Bethlehem?

JT: No. Okay. Most of the people that we interview live in South Bethlehem for a period of time or maybe they still living here or not. But it's basic Puerto Ricans in -- at large in Bethlehem.

VR: In Bethlehem, okay. [00:51:00]

JT: Yeah. Yes.

VR: Yeah. So yeah, I'm trying to think if there's anything that I missed that... I think I would be remiss to not

bring up the -- my experience in... And I didn't even think about it then. It's Woolworth's and on the South Side, and that discrimination growing up as a kid. It was probably the biggest joke growing up then. And again, just like my high school experience, you don't realize what it -- what was really happening until you're older and start to understand race relations and racism. As a kid, I thought they were just being jerks, following us around in the store and kicking us out. And I would do dumb things, like pick up things from one area and act like I took it and leave it [00:52:00] somewhere else in the store just to annoy them. And I remember a little store two doors away from the house, think it was the lady's house. But the front of it, she had a storefront. And it was candy and stuff like that. And she always thought we were stealing her candy. And so, we're exposed really young to (laughs) discrimination and prejudice. We probably didn't know how bad it was until now; like, holy crap. We experienced some real issues, whereas I feel like you asked about now, I feel that kids are so much more aware of what racism is now and discrimination. And they call it out more than we did growing up. But those were my experiences growing up. And

I don't think I would change any of them. I wish they lasted [00:53:00] a little longer. I wish I remembered more of them. I wish I remembered my proms and things. A friend of mine described the fact that she doesn't remember a lot of the stuff either, remember *Men in Black*, when they come and they do the wands so that you forget? And I feel like part of my experiences have been wiped for whatever reason. I don't remember teachers' names. I don't remember any of that. And people like, "You don't remember such and such?" I'm like, "No, I don't." But I do remember it as a overall good experience that I'm glad I had.

JT: (pause) Well, that's a great experience. And let's talk a little bit, now you bring that -- the topic of the discrimination. In your years when you was a young woman in South Bethlehem, there was situations that you had to reaffirm that you [00:54:00] are a Puerto Rican woman to somebody else or maybe because they think that you be a Puerto Rican, you are different or you're not capable of do somethings. You ever experience --

VR: Yeah, there was definitely those. And I mentioned some of the little stuff. Those little -- they're not little;

microaggressions with being following around in the store and kicked out. I spoke more Spanish when I was younger than I do now because my grandmother only spoke Spanish. So having comments and things said if we were speaking Spanish around... People who do not speak Spanish in stores and things like that... I even remember my own son, years later, being in Rite Aid on -- at Westgate, the Rite Aid there; being harassed by a older white gentleman that he better not steal anything. So [00:55:01] growing up, I definitely remember those things. And few incidents here and there, I don't remember anything blatant. Oh, I'm trying to think. I do a few times being called spic, especially during sports. I'm trying to remember what team it was, wouldn't shake our hands when we -- when you go under the net playing volleyball. Again, I think though I was so grounded in being Puerto Rican that it never shook that part of me. As I got older, I started to recognize that -- what being Puerto Rican meant more than the food and the music. But the Africanness, the [00:56:00] la bombs y plena [00:56:02], and why those things are so important; how our own people tried to wipe out that part of dis-- diminish it or make it equal to everything else;

and you start to realize those things when you get older.
But definitely had some experiences.

JT: (pause) Okay, Vivian, anything else that you want to add
or...?

VR: I think I got it all.

JT: Okay, again, thank you for your time, Vivian. I really
appreciate it.

VR: Thank you for interviewing me.

JT: Other than your aunt and your mom, any other person that
you have in mind that will be good that we talk with them?

VR: (pause) No, for me, I think those are the main two that you
should talk to, if you can. I can [00:57:00] connect you.
They're not very good at technology. So I would have to
get them connected to Zoom for it. (laughter)

JT: That's okay. That's not a problem. (laughter) Oh, well,
again, Vivian, thank you so much --

VR: Thank you.

JT: -- for your time. I really appreciate it. I have a great
deal of appreciation for you, for everything that you have
been done for the community.

VR: Thank you.

JT: Thank you again. And hopefully everything will be good for

you. Stay safe.

VR: Thank you. You too.

JT: I will see you soon.

VR: All right.

JT: Okay.

VR: Bye-bye.

JT: Thank you. Take care.

END OF AUDIO FILE