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JANINE CARAMBOT SANTORO: Okay, so, we're going to start this official interview. My name is Janine Carambot Santoro, I'm here with Teresa Donate, and today we're going to be talking about her life and experiences as a community leader in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as part of our Latinx Oral History Project. This project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, and today we are meeting on Zoom on March 18th, 2021. So, hi, Teresa, thank you so, much for doing this interview with us.

TERESA DONATE: Sure, my pleasure.

JCS: And so, to begin, we would just like to ask you to state your full name and spell it for us.

TD: My official full name is Maria Teresa Donate M-A-R-I-A T-E-R-E-S-A D-O-N-A-T-E. And [00:09:00] I'm to add something, because in our culture, we don't leave our moms behind. So, we use, also, our mom's last name. And my mom's last name was Mena, M-E-N-A.

JCS: Beautiful, thank you. And can you also share your birth date with us?

TD: I was born September 16th, 1953 in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico.

JCS: And you have received a copy of the consent form for this?

TD: Yes.

JCS: Great. And so, I'm just going to reiterate the questions that are on that consent form. The first one is, do you consent to this interview today?

TD: Yes.

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

TD: Yes.

JCS: Do you consent to the Latinx archive using your interview for educational purposes and other formats, [00:10:00] including films, articles, websites, presentations, and other formats?

TD: Yes.

JCS: And do you understand that you will have 30 days after the electronic delivery of this transcript to you to review your interview, identify any parts you'd like to delete, and or withdraw your interview from the project?

TD: Yes.

JCS: Wonderful. Thank you so, much, Teresa. We want to begin where all great stories begin which is about you, your family of origin, where you were born, what that was like. So, what was it like growing up for you? What was it like growing up in your family? In general, what was it like to grow up as Teresa Donate?

TD: Well, like I said I was born in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. Vega Baja [00:11:00] is a small town in the northern part of the island, and it was known for its sugarcane. We had a big factory, and we have plantations. And so, the nickname for my hometown is "Melao Melao." Melao is the sugar that comes out of the sugarcane, so, I'm a proud Vegabajeña[00:11:21]. I was born in a family with three older brothers, and I was the youngest and I was the female. So, I always felt very protected by my brothers. And growing up, in our culture brothers tend to be kind of the gatekeepers and the watchers. So, it was funny because growing up, I did have many friends but somehow, I tend to gravitate toward the boys. I don't know why, maybe because I was being raised [00:12:00] in a family of three boys. So, I was never a tomboy, I was always very girly, but very, very much -- even today, my closest friends are boys, males. So, I was born in a hometown that had a beach, and I remember my fond memories of -- my grandfather had a beach house, and he would pick us up every summer. I remember, I can still see his car picking us up with my grandmother and he'll take us to his beach house. And I would spend all my summers by the beach, and it was just wonderful because he would not only pick us up, he would also pick up our cousins. So, it was kind of a big mix of

cousins and nephews and aunts and uncles, because my grandfather's house had another house by it, so, my uncles and aunts would go there. [00:13:00] So, I just remember, at ten o'clock in the morning, we would grab our bathing suits and hit the beach and we would go in the morning from 10:00 to 11:00, because remember, the sun, we didn't have suntan lotion back then. And then, we would go in late afternoon. And it was just -- and it has influenced me to the point where when I moved to the States, I had these cravings for seafood and I'm like, "What is it about -- what's going on? What's this craving for seafood?" And then one time we found this place that had seafood and I said, "It's not the seafood, it's the smell, and it's the desire to be close to the ocean." So, I would say I'm a beach girl. I still love the beach. I have a place by the beach that every time I can escape, I go. I love swimming [00:14:00] and kayaking and boating and all that. That's something that I grew up with. Then, my father bought a beach house, so, I remember the rest of my adolescent years were with my father and my brothers by the beach. So, I was very lucky. Remember, an island, we're so, close, we're all coast, so, it doesn't matter where you go in Puerto Rico. You're always close to the ocean breeze. And actually, that was one of the things that, really, I found

harder when I moved to the States, is just that desire to be by the ocean. So, needless to say, living with three older brothers, it was very hard for me to get a boyfriend because all their friends [00:15:00] were the possible candidates, you know? So, they kind of alerted all their friends that they could never date me because it was prohibited because I was their sister. (laughs) So, it was not easy for me to date. And back, then, also, my father was very strict. I mean, this is a time when you couldn't go outside in shorts because that was kind of not acceptable. So, no shorts allowed. I was never taught to ride a bike because it was not very womanly. So, I would say my father was very traditional and my brothers followed the same. So, I had an opportunity, somehow, to find a boyfriend. (laughs) And I went to college in Puerto Rico. So, I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, [00:16:00] and when it was time to really take off, I went to the University of Puerto Rico. I'm proud of the University of Puerto Rico, very proud of it. And there, I went to undergrad and I studied psychology there. And then, later on I went on to finish my master's degree in guidance and counseling. And that really guided the rest of my career for the rest of my life. For some reason, I was always interested in helping people. It was in my nature. I

found myself always, even in elementary school, I was in clubs that would do something for somebody. And in college, the same thing. I still remember in college, the first thing I did was to join the peer counseling group, [00:17:00] and it was so, amazing to be able to help incoming freshman with that adaptation to college life. And that kind of guided me to what I wanted to see in the future.

JCS: So, that's incredible. Did you also get your master's in Puerto Rico?

TD: I did get my master's in Puerto Rico, at Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, in San Germán. Yes, and so, after I finished my master's, I was a counselor at a private school. Then I moved to the Interamerican University, and I was a counselor there for a couple of years, and always helping incoming freshmen, or youth, college life for a lot of our kids. and I've always picked higher-ed institutions [00:18:00] that were not Ivy Leagues. These are the schools that may not have the highest admission standards, but are institutions that give the students a second chance, a second opportunity. So, I've always gravitated to those institutions. And that was Interamerican University. I was in the counseling office for many years. And then our chancellor one day called me

and said, "You know, you have so many administrative skills, would you like to some administrative work?" And I said, "Okay, let's give it a shot. As long as I'm in a position where I can help students." So, I was the Director of Admissions for a couple of years at Interamerican University. And then, in the meantime, I divorced from my first husband, and I had my oldest daughter, which is actually -- I'm so, proud of her, I call her Teresita. She is [00:19:00] an attorney in Philadelphia. So, I had my daughter. Actually, my first husband was in the ROTC, so, as soon as we graduated from college, we went to California, because he was stationed at Edwards Air Force Base. It was a wonderful experience to be in the desert, but again, I missed the ocean. So, there, my daughter was born in that base. We came back to Puerto Rico, and then a couple of years after I got divorced, I went to work for Interamerican University as counselor, and then Director of Admissions, and then I met my current husband, which is Ricardo, and I also have two children from this marriage, Carlito [00:19:48] right now he is a chemical engineer, and he lives in Langhorne. And then, my daughter, Ivette is a nurse, and she lives here in Bethlehem. So, I [00:20:00] have three beautiful children that I'm very, very proud of. And I have to say this

because I'm bursting of joy. My youngest daughter, and then my son's wife, are pregnant, so, I'm going to be a grandma. And I've been craving to be a grandma (laughs) for so, many years. And I'm so, excited I'm going to be a grandma by the end of August. My son's wife is going to have the baby, and then my daughter is scheduled to have a baby in the middle of September. So, I'll talk about that later, but I had to say that. That's something that I'm really, really so, excited about. So, I was Director of Admissions at Interamerican University of Puerto Rico. I already had my three children; I was married to Ricardo. And on one good day we said -- it was a tough decision, but we said, "You know, [00:21:00] let's just explore a different world. Let's just change venues and prove ourselves as a family, can we survive all together?" Because in Puerto Rico, you have a lot of help. Your immediate family is always close to you. You always have a good support system, and we were like, "Let's just try the United States." We were always curious about, how do you make it in the United States? And also, the possibility of improving your lifestyle, and having a better financial situation. So, that's when we decided to move to the United States. And let me tell you, that was an experience. We just took our three kids, our clothing, I

mean, nothing else, and we arrived at Orlando, Florida. And so, [00:22:00] Orlando was probably the closest thing that we thought it was going to be easier for us to adjust because of climate. Also, there was a big migration of Puerto Ricans to Florida in the early '90s. Still is, but back then, that was kind of the promised land. So, we pack our kids, we landed in Orlando, we rent this house with no furniture. So, that same day, we went and bought waterbeds -- I still remember because we are such great fans of waterbeds. And we knew our kids would be content if they just had a waterbed. So, we just bought their waterbeds, our waterbed, and then we bought some director's chairs for the living area. And we lived like that for a couple -- we were in Orlando for two years. I was lucky to, [00:23:00] as soon as I arrived, to be hired by the University of Central Florida. I was the coordinator of student affairs for their Brevard Campus, and I loved it because I was close to the ocean. Brevard is that place close to the NASA launch station, so, I saw a couple of those being launched. So, I was happy. Although I was commuting a little bit, I was happy because I'm thinking I was closer to the ocean than in Orlando. My husband started working, and he's not afraid to say it, doing dishes in a restaurant. Mind you, he has a bachelor's degree and

almost a master's, but his challenge was the language. And he said, "I'll do anything." So, he started as a dishwasher in a restaurant. And they saw his potential, so, they moved him up to prep, and he was so, proud of being in the prep area. [00:24:00] The prep area is the station where you get the meals ready for the cook. And then, he's such a great cook that the manager said, "You know, why don't you be a cook?" And he goes, "Whoa, that's a promotion." Mind you, he was not getting a lot more money, but for him, it was an opportunity to learn the language and to interact with others. And my husband, his language skills were not that good, but he was never afraid of speaking. So, people were like, "That's not how you say it, Ricardo." He said, "Okay, just tell me how I say it." So, he grew within the restaurant, but pretty soon he said, "I'm somebody with a bachelor's degree and I know enough English now, let me try other venues." So, then he started working for the Florida State toll collector supervisor, [00:25:00] in the toll plaza. And there, he had more responsibilities, and he felt a little bit more accomplished. In the meantime, I'm traveling to Brevard County in Florida, so, during the day -- my husband would work nights, so, he would get home in the morning, I would go to work around 11 o'clock. Our son and our daughter were in school, but the youngest daughter

was not, so, I still remember leaving her at 11 o'clock in the morning with Dad in the room. Dad was sleeping, but he would lock her into the room, and he would watch her until my daughter would get home from middle school, and then my daughter would take over, the oldest, so, my husband could sleep better, and she will take care of the other two, brother and sister, until I got [00:26:00] home. So, it was a time of many sacrifices. But even I was telling them the other day, "Do you remember that we didn't have any furniture?" And they say, "Mom, we don't remember that, because for us, it was like we were there." We were family, and it was kind of a good opportunity to say, "Hey, we can do this, and we can really grow as a family. It was a good time." The only concern, I remember one day going to a movie theater with my husband and the kids and I looked around and I could not find one familiar face. I looked around and I said to my husband, "I cannot be in a place where I don't have any roots." And let's face it, Florida is Mickey Mouse land. We couldn't find -- although we had good neighbors, but it was such a transient state, [00:27:00] and we found ourselves -- we're very gregarious. We like to be surrounded by friends, or family, and we felt kind of lonely there. And we decided, "I'm not sure this is what we want for our kids." So, I said, "Let's just go

north and let's see what happens in the north. Let's find a place that is a small place, that maybe we can make friends and maybe have closer relationships with our community." I also found that on myself, I was kind of sheltered in the university, but I did find that that was not a community that I was ready to penetrate, or get involved with, because that [00:28:00] community was very transient. So, I had this urge to say, "Hey, I need to belong. I need to find a place where I can be myself." And that's how we ended up in Bethlehem.

JCS: And so, I know you mentioned your thinking that brought you to Bethlehem, which is the need for community. So, how did you hear about Bethlehem? Did you already have family living in Bethlehem? And I guess to backtrack a little bit, who were the people in Puerto Rico, in Florida, or perhaps in Bethlehem, that you were already talking to that helped shape you or influence your decisions? What were some of those relationships that you did have? Maybe you didn't have a lot of that in Florida, but what were some of the relationships you had with people that helped you really have courage --

TD: To come here, yes.

JCS: Yes.

TD: So, believe it or not, [00:29:00] I was applying for a couple of places. Actually, I was offered a job in Arizona, and when I went to visit the place I said, "No, I cannot be in the desert." It was an aeronautical school, Embry-Riddle. And I came back from the interview and I said to my husband -- I lived in the desert before in California and I loved it, but to permanently live in the desert, I'm not sure. Remember, I'm an islander, and I need to be close to the ocean. So, believe it or not, I did apply for the job in Bethlehem because of an ad I found in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the job really was Director of Admissions at Northampton Community College. And the description, they were very good about not only describing the job, but the location. So, they described Bethlehem as a small town, [00:30:00] very historical, and very safe. And I started researching Bethlehem, and it's unbelievable, I found a lot of similarity with the town that I was working at in Puerto Rico, San Germán, where I was working at the university. I found a lot of very quaint towns, very historical, and I said, "Oh my God, this is another San Juan. So, maybe we can feel that we're at home at Bethlehem." So, I came, and I have to say, I had a wonderful experience, because they asked me to come for two days. And I have to say that the

person that really sold me to Bethlehem was Mardi McGuire Closson. Mardi was very instrumental in making me feel like you could have a good life here, [00:31:00] not only at the college but in town. So, the interview process I still remember, was not only to -- I was interviewed by a lot of people on campus, but she made sure that one day that I had lunch with Blanca Smith. Blanca Smith is, in this community, a pioneer in our Latino community. She is -- she was, she's already dead, que en paz descanse [00:31:33]. Blanca was such an enlightening person since I went to the interview, so, Mardi said, "I'm going to ask you to have lunch with Blanca Smith, and Blanca can tell you how it is, how do we do things in this town." And I had a wonderful luncheon with Blanca. Blanca said, "I promise that if you take this job, I'll take care of you." [00:32:00] So, Mardi also made sure that I interviewed with all the Spanish-speaking people on campus. The campus was not very diverse at that point, but they were really trying to make it diverse, and maybe that's why I was also highly recommended for the job. So, anyway, I had lunch with Blanca Smith and then at the end of the interview, the final two hours before I went to the airport, Mardi said, "You know, I'm going to give you a tour of town." And she did it. She took me to the historical Bethlehem, and I'm

like, "Oh my God, this is San Germán!" (laughs) So, that sold me. I didn't have any connections with this town. I didn't know anybody until I came for the interview. So, I went back, and I said to my husband, [00:33:00] "I think that's a town," oh, she also made sure that I knew the history of the steel, and the large population of Puerto Ricans that moved to Bethlehem back in the steel era. And she took me through the steel -- the factory was open, so, I was able to see the people working and I'm like, "Wow, I think it's a good town for our kids and for myself, and for us to get involved." So, I always was the one -- because I was probably the one who really had a better dominion of the English, so, my husband has always being so, kind and say, "You go ahead and get the job, and I'll follow you. (laughs) Because I'll find a job, but I think that it's more important for you to find the job that you want." So, when I went back to Florida, [00:34:00] I said to Ricardo, "Ricardo, I think Bethlehem, it's a good place for our family. I feel that we can really make friends there. And I think the college is going to be a good atmosphere." And they gave me the job and I came.

JCS: And then, how did your children feel at the time about doing this big move? I know you mentioned before that, reflecting back, what they remember is family. They maybe

didn't remember so, much of the hardships or not having certain things. Were they optimistic about it? How did you feel as a parent bringing them over there, to Bethlehem?

TD: The little ones, they were still in elementary school. So, the little ones, really for them, was almost, "I'm with Mom and Dad." [00:35:00] Now the oldest one, the one that I mentioned that is an attorney, had a harder time because she was in middle school in Florida, and she went to University High School, which is an excellent high school in Orlando, and she already has friends, and she is in her teenage years. So, for her when she came to Bethlehem, it was a hard adjustment. Now I have to say that she went right into Liberty High School, and Liberty, for some time, because she was in the honors program, so, for some years, she said, "Mom, sometimes I feel like I don't belong, because I'm not good enough for the white kids in the honors program, but I am maybe [00:36:00] too much for the Latino kids because I'm in the honors program, so, they see me as sometimes not even an equal." She didn't understand why. So, she even narrated an experience. She said, "Mom, there's a room for kids that are in the honors program just to go," and she'd chat and share experiences. "And whenever I go into that room, I don't feel like I'm welcome

there." And I said, "Okay, Teresita, you need to find that group where you find more affinity with." And you know what she did? She joined the Latino Leadership Club at Liberty High School. And that club still exists. I am invited every year to a luncheon that they have for the discovery of Puerto Rico, and let me tell you, she joined that club and I remember that Elly Vazquez was her counselor at Liberty High School, and she felt like, "Mom, I feel like I belong." She became a leader, she became the president of the club, [00:37:00] and I would go to the luncheons every year. And finally, she said, "I chose my identity," and the club gave her that venue to feel welcomed. So, she was the one who had the hardest time. Now, I have to say, the education she got at Liberty was excellent. She went to Penn State, and once she was at Penn State, I think she felt more at home, because Penn State gave her other opportunities, and she was away from home. And we've taught my kids early in life, you can move on. You can go. We did it. So, at Penn State, she really felt welcome and better. And then, when she was done with her bachelor's, and I think she did it in labor relations, then she went to Temple University for her law degree. And of course, she loved Philadelphia, she stayed in Philadelphia [00:38:00] and she's still there.

JCS: Wonderful. So, you walked us through Teresita's experience of trying to find belonging. So, I know coming to Bethlehem you mentioned it wasn't quite so, diverse yet. So, where were the places that you felt like you belonged in the community, where were the places where you felt there perhaps wasn't a place of belonging, but that you wanted to create that space? What was that like for you navigating Bethlehem once you were here?

TD: I have to say that I think we made the right decision. At the beginning, it was tough. I have to say that for a while I thought I had moved to the Twilight Zone. (laughs) Because just let me tell you, this is 28 years ago. Bethlehem was not that diverse. If you were not in the Southside, it was not diverse. Let me tell you one story because that's a good example of the difficulties that people, [00:39:00] Latinos moving to this valley you encounter. Of course, I was sheltered, I have to say, at the college. The college really went out of their way to really make me feel welcome. And Mardi was a blessing. She felt responsible for bringing me to the valley, so, as soon as I arrived, she said, "Okay, we're going to put you in your apartment," because we didn't have a place to live. So, we lived in this college apartment, this student apartment in the summer. I remember it was July, "Let's

put you there until you find a place." So, we moved there, and then I started looking for a place to live. And we go through the classifieds, the usual way. The first place that we looked at was a place in Allentown. It was a townhouse. [00:40:00] And my husband called the owner and said, "I'm interested in seeing the house." Well, as soon as the owner picks up the accent, the owner goes, "I'm not sure you would be interested." And my husband says, "Well, let me make that decision." And he said, "Well come at two o'clock. I'm not sure I'm going to be available. I may be showing the house. But you can come at two o'clock." So, I remember, Janine, it was a hot summer day. We go to the house, we knock on the door, we're outside, we're sweating, and the guy comes to the door and says, "I will come out in a little bit," and he never came out. And we were out there -- again, I'm glad I was not with the kids in the middle of summer. And I looked at my husband and I said, "This is not good. This guy is not going to come out. He doesn't want to rent us." So, very, very discouraged. Then we said, "Okay, let's look for realtor." So, we called this realtor, and we found a townhouse very close to the college. [00:41:00] And again, I had never seen snow, so, my concern is, I want to be close to the college, because I don't want to be driving in the snow. So, we get

this place close to the college, and we went, and we saw it, it was awesome, and we said to the realtor, "We want it." Then next day, the realtor calls us and says, "I am so, so, sorry but the owner doesn't want to rent to you guys." And I said, "What is the deal?" And she said, "Well, by the way I dropped her," this is the realtor, so, embarrassed, "I dropped her from my clients, because she clearly demonstrated that she's very biased." And it was so, hurtful. I mean, I still remember. I had tears in my eyes, and I'm like, "Where am I going to live in Bethlehem?" So, I called my husband and said, "Listen, the deal is out." And he said, "Well, we're going to drop also the realtor, because [00:42:00] we need somebody that will do the walking for us, and not make us go through that." That's very tough. It is hard. And I'm thinking, "I cannot live at the college forever." So, I go to Mardi with tears in my eyes and said, "Mardi, I can't find a place to live. I've tried twice, and somehow, I have not been able to secure any rentals." Mardi said, "Do not worry. I'll find you a realtor." So, she finds me Peggy Vary -- I still remember her -- from Fishburn Realty. And she said, "This is the realtor that got a house for our president. She's a friend of the college. She will do good for you." So, we met Peggy, and Peggy was so,

wonderful. Peggy said, "Okay, what is it that you want?" And we said, "We just want to rent, because we don't know where we want to live. We want to rent first and then explore." So, she goes, "I'll do the walking for you. [00:43:00] You don't even have to make any phone calls." So, she got us this beautiful townhouse in Hanover Township. A great location, great schools, and she said, "Are you ready to move?" I mean, no questions asked. And we moved to Hanover Township. And I mean, it was such a great neighborhood, a lot of good younger kids. My kids were like, "Oh my God." They had a good time there. So, two years later, I said to Ricardo, "I think that's our American Dream, to have a home. Let's try for a home." And again, we called Peggy and we said to Peggy, "Peggy, we need a house, and will you do the walking for us?" And she goes, "I'll do it for you," and then, I had been able to go to the surrounding towns, like Pen Argyl, and Nazareth, and I said, "Peggy, [00:44:00] I love houses in those areas because they look like they have a lot of land," and Peggy was steering us, always, to Bethlehem. And she goes, "Teresa, I don't think you should go to Pen Argyl or Nazareth. Why don't you stay in the city?" And she was so, diplomatic. "The city tends to be more diverse," and I would say, "I'll follow your advice." And she said, "Don't

even worry about going to those. I will find you a house." So, she comes to this house that we're still living in, and the house was owned by a faculty member from Cedar Crest College, and her husband, I think, was a teacher at Lehigh. And they had adopted kids. Their adopted kids, one of them was African American. So, we see the house, [00:45:00] we love it, and then Peggy goes to the owners and says, "These are the people that would like to buy the house," and they said, "We love it. We would love to leave our house to somebody that would appreciate what it is to be different." And we were so, grateful, because it was such a great buy. Back then, it was hard (inaudible). We said, "Hey, let's bite the bullet." And that's the home we're still in.

JCS: That's incredible. So, after facing discrimination and finally realizing you needed almost like an intermediary, someone that could help you.

TD: Exactly. And she was such a good ally because she was never bashing anybody. She never talked about anything, because she didn't want to poison our souls, which I appreciated. But then later on, Janine, [00:46:00] I find out that there was some KKK groups in those areas that I wanted to go to. So, I called Peggy and I said, "Peggy, now I understand why you wanted me to stay in Bethlehem." She said, "I never wanted to tell you because I didn't want

to scare you. Yes." Because I started reading the paper that there were some groups still in those areas. And she said, "That's exactly why." And she said, "Also, Bethlehem Area School District has such a good reputation and I have to say," her kids went to the school district and they really did well. So, let me tell you, my kids had a wonderful experience. They all went to public school and actually, we were so close to Liberty that our kids had to walk to Liberty every day, because they wouldn't provide bus transportation. So, meanwhile at the college, it was hard to break into the culture of the college. I was the first director that was really of different background. Mostly the directors and administrators at [00:47:00] the college were people that looked like the common, good old American people. Excuse me for a second, let me get some water here. So, breaking into the college culture was also not easy. I adopted -- not adopted. I started in the admissions office that had one person that was of Mexican descent, Salvador Espinosa [00:47:40] and he quickly became my ally. It's interesting because it's not just about culture but about how do we act in groups? My background is, I love the teamwork. [00:48:00] Me as the supervisor always wanted to gather input and feedback from staff about what is your preference, what would you like to do? So, in

this case, let me give you an example. We had to visit our neighboring school districts to talk to the high schools and the students. So, we had divided the area into regions. And my first staff meeting was, "Okay," with my staff, my admissions counselors, "What area do you prefer to do cover?" And they looked at me and said, "Well, we were always told what area to cover." And I said, "Well, but my preference is that you tell me what area you would like to go to and what high schools you would like to go to." Nothing against the previous Director [00:49:00] of Admissions, which was Mardi Clossen. Mardi had been promoted to Dean of Students, and she was the Director of Admissions. Mardi was the kind of person, her style was very direct, and she will tell people -- because she had an ability to also gauge the skills, and then she'll tell people, "This is what I think you should do," and she would tell them to do. But my approach was different. My approach was, "What is it that makes you more comfortable?" And I have to say, my first year in admissions was very tough, because people would not react to my leadership style. They were like, "Well, we need direction." And I said, "I want to give you direction, but I want to know first, what is your desire? What would you like to do?" It was very hard, not only to do that in my immediate

office, but also in the college culture. The Director of Admissions at the college was seen, at that point, as somebody that would give a lot of guidance in terms of [00:50:00] recruitment and retention. And the recruitment, I'll be darned, enrollment started to go down. So, when enrollment is down, all eyes are on the admissions office, because we are driven by tuition. So, if we do not have enough enrollment, we are in trouble, our budget really doesn't make it. So, all the eyes were, really, all the time on the admissions office. And let me tell you (laughs) the president would visit my office at least once a week and he's like, "My God," and his name was Dr. Robert Kopecek. He died. And Kopecek was a pain you know where. He was always like, "How are the numbers? Are we going to meet our goals?" And it was tough times. So, all that pressure on you, to meet the enrollment goals, [00:51:00] and also at the same time, I think people accepted me at the college, but I think they also had a hard time trying to figure out who I was and where I come from. Let me give you an example. I would go to a meeting and people will say, "Okay, so, what are the numbers? How are we doing?" And I would say, "Good morning, how are you today? How is your family?" And they're like, "Where is she coming from? This is time wasted." And I'm like, "No, let me tell you

what happened with my kids this morning," and they're like, "Okay." So, I have to say that eventually, I had to get acculturated to the other culture because people didn't seem to have time to really spend time chit-chatting. But every time I had a chance to do it, I would do it, at least with my staff. So, I would start the meeting, "How's the family doing? [00:52:00] Any new dogs? Any new babies? Anybody pregnant? (laughs) How's everyone doing?" So, in that sense, changing the culture of that office was tough. So, five years later into that office, I decided that although I was helping students, because I was given access to students that wanted to study at the college, and that's the beauty of the community college. Again, I did say to you that I was attracted to institution that provided people with second chances. And the college was a beautiful opportunity. So, I was given access to students. I remember getting parents in the admissions office that they will say -- because they still do have a very strong ESL program, so, we got a lot of Spanish-speaking students in our offices, and they will say, [00:53:00] "Hey, I need somebody that speaks Spanish," and I will be there, taking care of parents. And parents were very nervous about sending their kids to college. Remember, a lot of our kids were first-generation college students. So, the parents

didn't know anything about college or Pell Grants or how to apply for financial aid. So, I found myself helping a lot of students from that perspective from the admissions office. But there's always the pressure of the numbers and to meet the enrollment goals. And I'm like, "You know what?" At some point I really feel that I was born a counselor. So, again, I go to Mardi Closson, and I said, "Mardi, I had my experience in admissions, like I had my experience in admissions in Puerto Rico. I've also been a counselor. Is there any possible that I can move to faculty?" And we had a retirement and they offered me the faculty position, and the college counselors are faculty. [00:54:00] And we also were able to teach. So, that's how I ended up as counselor at the college. Let me drink some water here.

JCS: Sure, take your time.

TD: Do you have a question?

JCS: No, no, keep going. This is wonderful. Go ahead.

TD: So, at that new position, I felt like I had died and went to heaven, because it's like, "Oh my God, the sky is the limit." And I had an opportunity to -- remember Blanca Smith when I accepted the position in admissions, Blanca was so, so proud of me. So, she took me to every event in the community, every conference, and she will go, "This is

the Director of Admissions, and is the first Latina to be appointed as Director of the college," [00:55:00] and she showed me the ways and the ropes of the Lehigh Valley. And she took me to important meetings. And then that's how I started to really get involved in the community. Now being Director of Admissions didn't allow me a lot of time because the job was really a lot of responsibility. And also, I had my kids at home, still, trying to adjust to this new life. And again, I have to say, I'm so, blessed to have such a supportive family, because my husband really was such a great help. By the way, the college did hire my husband, and he ended up being in the IT department. And he's still there, and he's very happy, and very productive. So, the college was also so, good in that sense, to say, "Hey, he has great skills also," and eventually they hired him. So, I started in [00:56:00] the counseling office, and again, it was like, "Oh my God, this is my time," because not only I was able to serve students more directly and a lot of Latino students tended to gravitate towards me, so, I would help them from not just only the admissions process, but, "Let me get you help to fill out the financial aid form." And they would bring their parents, again, and this time we would sit and say, "Okay, let me help you register for classes," and look for teachers that

I thought were a good fit for these students. And then I got involved in clubs. So, I would see students from another perspective. I was the Advisor for Student Senate. So, that was another platform to help our Latino students, [00:57:00] because I would encourage them to run for office, and I would help them fill out the forms and run their campaigns. And we had, twice, Latino Student Council Presidents. Actually, I was so, proud of her, one of them was undocumented. And let me tell you, that's another area that I thought, "Gee." Because I would get a lot of undocumented students in my office, and they struggled, because our admissions form did require -- it still does require that you put your Social Security Number, and citizenship and all that. So, from my new role as counselor, I was able to do more advocacy and bring to the forefront of the college the fact that undocumented students that really were [00:58:00] raised here, they should have the opportunity to be considered what we call in county tuition rates, because the community college has different tuition rates. It all depends on where do you reside? If you reside in this county, then your tuition is discounted. So, I was able to really get the college to look at students, let's say, that came from the Bethlehem Area School District, that they could prove that they went

all their school year, they were K through 12, they were here. So, because of our advocacy, and a tremendous group that we also started on campus called the Hispanic Caucus, we were able to bring to the forefront the fact that the college should stop asking some questions. And the problem is that if you get federal funds, you have to be very [00:59:00] careful, because you need to abide by the federal regulations. But there was nothing that would go against that law. So, what the college decided to do was that if undocumented students were able to prove that they graduated from a local high school, they would be considered in-county, and their tuition rate was discounted. Let me tell you, that was such a big accomplishment. Because to start with, these kids don't have money. They don't have financial aid. So, they really were taking, sometimes, one or two or three classes, because they couldn't afford it. So, on top of that, if you charge them out of county tuition, that was double tuition. So, that was one of our great accomplishments. And the college -- we always did advocacy in such a way that was respectable. What I did was, I gained their trust [01:00:00] and respect, and I always fought the good battles within reason and with the truth. And the college, I remember the president back then was Art Scott, and Art

Scott was such a blessing, also, as president. I would go to Art and say, "Art, this is not fair. These kids should not be paying double tuition." And he would say, "Teresa, what do we need to do to fix it?" And we fixed it. So, going back to the Hispanic Caucus, again, early in my days in admissions office, it felt a little bit lonely, because there weren't that many Latinos on campus. And Virginia Gonzalez was a counselor, and one day she came to my office and said, "Teresa, why don't we start a caucus of Hispanic people on campus?" And I said, "Oh my God, oh my God." So, we created the Hispanic Caucus, and that's how we started our meetings, because we felt that some people could be paranoid on campus, thinking, [01:01:00] "What are they planning?" So, we said, "Our meetings are going to be open." I offered my admissions office conference room. And we had seven people in the administration that were Latinos, and we would congregate every month. Oh my God, and we started doing so, many beautiful things, among them, advocate for undocumented students. We started planning a lot of cultural events. We would support each other. When it was time for promotion, we would put in a good word for each other. I mean, just having a place where you can be you. We would conduct, sometimes, the meetings in Spanish and we would bring music. We would bring food. And again,

one of the other great things we did from the caucus standpoint was to create -- because Blanca retired from the college, and I created a scholarship fund to honor Blanca [01:02:00] Smith, and even today, we have the Blanca Smith Scholarship Fund, and the caucus gives scholarships to Latino students once a year. I also started a scholarship to honor my dad, Mario Jose Donate. My dad's story was also very interesting. He was very, very smart. He always wanted to become a lawyer, and he did venture, maybe -- talking to you Jeni, what a great insight. Maybe that's why I ventured, also, to come to the United States. My father tried to come, and he did. And he wanted to go to school, and he wanted to become a lawyer but he couldn't handle the pressure of the language, so, he returned to the island and he became a very successful business owner. But since we were born, my father said, "You will always go to college." [01:03:00] And we did. But now, what a wonderful insight, talking to you. Maybe my desire to come back to the States was to see if I could make it, because my father couldn't. So, to honor his memory and his desire to learn the language and all that, I started -- I'm sorry. I started the scholarship in his name, and even today, I have given the scholarship to a couple of Latino students. The last student that got the scholarship, is in the dental

hygiene program, and she sent me a letter the other day saying how grateful she is for getting the scholarship, and actually, the student is an undocumented student. So, [01:04:00] she started in the ESL program, she made it into the dental hygiene program, and we gave her the Mario Jose Donate -- I'm sorry about that. It's been quite a story. So, my father is honored with that scholarship. And even when I retire from the college, my colleagues from the Hispanic Caucus made a commitment that they will continue giving the scholarship to Latino students in perpetuity.

JCS: That's incredible to hear how far the Latino community within NCC has come, and those that are looking to you, because for those students, you are the first to do these [01:05:00] things. The first Latina to accomplish this much, and to say, "I can do hard things."

TD: And you don't know how many students have seen -- that bring me their kids, that they got married. When I apply for Social Security and found one of my students in the Social Security Office, and he was like, "Oh my God, do you remember me?" And he was like -- I took one under my wing, and she ended up staying in my house because she had problems at home, and I said, "Hey, you can stay at my house." So, I retired recently from the college, and they were so, kind to appoint me Professor Emeritus, which is a

great distinction. And I am so, honored to have gotten that distinction. And I'm thinking -- and I have a colleague that is really kind of [01:06:00] another me. Her name is Elba Carides, and I said, "Elba, you need to follow. You need to continue because this work is not done." I mean this work will never be done, but it's getting, sometimes -- in this time it's even harder. So, that was my work at the college. In the meantime, I was very involved in the community. I was appointed by Governor Rendell, and now, by Governor Wolf to become a commissioner for the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs. And that has giving me the opportunity to be the eyes and the ears of the governor in the local area. So, we're lucky to meet with the governor and to say, "This is what's affecting our community." And let me tell you, we give him an earful and we've been -- at least under the two administrations that I have served under, they have been very lucky to have governors that are really listening, [01:07:00] and saying, "This is exactly what we need to hear." I've always been very involved in other organizations, such as, for example, I was one of the founders of the Latino Leadership Alliance, an organization very close to our hearts. That organization grew out of the Hispanic Business Council of the Lehigh Valley Chamber.

Hold on for a second, my dog is -- I had to take care of my dog he's a little bit, you know. He's here, he wants to be closer. So, the Hispanic Business Council decided at some point to start this group and this group still is in existence, and we've done wonderful things, from awarding hundreds of scholarships to students, to helping students fill [01:08:00] their financial aid forms. We have dealt with health disparities, and this group is reenergized and is looking forward to having a new great leader as their president. (laughs) We're trying to recruit, between you and me, Jeni. So, I was telling Janine that for us it's a great honor to have served this community, but I think it's also good for us to pass on the baton, and I'm hoping that people like Janine will take on the baton. I'm also very proud to say that I've had my share of raising hell in the community. Always carrying on the baton with distinction. Let me give you an anecdote of something that happened that I'm very proud of. [01:09:00] I think it was back in 2003, if I'm not mistaken, no, that was 2006. There was two openings in the Bethlehem Area School District board, school board, and we decided, it's time to step up, and Sandra Figueroa and myself -- Sandra Figueroa is actually now the current Director of the Leadership Academy in Allentown, a great educator. So, a couple of us got

together in a coalition and said, "Okay, let's put some names forward to fill that vacancy in the school board." And Sandra and I decided, "Let's do it." So, we presented our documentation, and we went to the interview, and we started calling the papers, and saying -- and the papers were, I was just looking through some of the articles, and *The Morning Call* saying, "It's time for the school district to step up and have representation from the Latino community." But guess what? [01:10:00] None of the two were selected. And we were very, very upset. Instead, it was a guy named Hesky, and he did assure that he knew the Latino community and he would represent us well. So, we were not very happy with that. And actually, with the support of the Latino Leadership Alliance, we picketed the school district. (laughs) I still remember. I took a couple of students from the college that said -- my Latino students said, "It's not fair. This is not fair. I'm going to go and picket for you." So, we picketed one of the Bethlehem School District board meetings. We called the press, they interviewed us. I'm telling you, for a couple of weeks, a lot of editorials were about the unfair practice of the Bethlehem Area School District. And what a great loss and a great opportunity to have appointed one of the two educators that really represented that community.

[01:11:00] So, we decided, that's not enough. Picketing is good to raise awareness, but why is it that it is so, hard for anybody, any Latino, to be elected? So, what we decided to do was to sue the school district. And we found a practice, a law practice, that did it pro bono and they said, "It is only fair." We did sue the school district. The topic was, "Create at least one seat that would be representative of the specific area," because all the seats are at large. So, create at least one that would be for a specific ward, for a specific area, and that area is the one that is mainly Latino. So, we did it and we won the lawsuit, [01:12:00] and we still, today, have that. So, we actually -- Aurea Ortiz was elected one year, and then was another person elected. It has not been easy to have people run for office. And that has not being something that I have been attracted to, because I've always felt that I could do more being a voice in the community. But that's something that I said, "Hey," and that's why we moved here, because we believe that the system should work, but at the same time, you have to raise awareness for it. And it did work. So, I think that's a great accomplishment. So, in this community, I've always felt, [01:13:00] after I was able to get involved, I always felt that I was appreciated, and I always felt that I finally

belonged, that I finally found a place where I can say, "Wow, this is family." And my husband was saying the other day, "Why don't we move to the Carolinas?" And I said, "Again? We're going to face the same dilemma. I need to be around places where I can relate to people. Who do I know in the Carolinas that I can move to?" Yo quiero estar cerca de mi gente, si quiero comer chicharron de pollo voy al south side allí a la bodegita, o al restaurante de Williams, que esta por Liberty High School. Y allí tu comes chicharron de pollo, arroz con buster, chuleta frita.

[01:13:30] I love to do that. I mean, my hairdresser is Latina, y yo voy a la casa to get it cut [01:13:50] and she does a wonderful job. So, I don't have family here, I mean, extended family, [01:14:00] but my community -- and I mean, my friends are not only Latinos, I have my neighbors, but I always felt like that, for me, is what I needed, and I felt like in this community, I had the opportunity to do so. But we still have a long way to grow. Like I said before, it has not been that easy. But I think the timing is good. The timing right now is better than ever. I think the Black Lives Matter movement has created a lot of awareness. And so, when I talk to my good friend, Guillermo Lopez, who has always been such a great lighthouse in my life, because that's another person that I

will go to and say, "Guillermo, what do you think about this?" And he will say, "Hey, you are in the right track," or he would say, "No, you're not in the right track." So, when I talk to Guillermo, and I say, "All [01:15:00] the battles that we've been fighting for the last 25 years, all of a sudden are in the forefront, and I think people are listening more." So, in a way I don't feel like I've wasted my 25 years, but that this is the time. And that's why we are looking forward to people like Janine, this is the time to even move the needle forward.

JCS: And so, when you mentioned the Black Lives Matter, I should say the Latino Community as a whole, we think of how diverse we are, especially as Puerto Ricans. We have our Afro Latino brothers and sisters, we have such variety within the Latinx Community, so, when you say we have a long way to go, what are the things that come to mind for you? What would you like to see happen in our immediate community and on a national (inaudible)?

TD: [01:16:00] I still feel that, especially with the pandemic, all those inequalities have surfaced. Why is it that our Latino population doesn't have access to the vaccine? Why is it that the Latino population has the higher mortality rate? Well, it is because we're in the front lines. We are the service people. We're the cleaning and the

hospitality and the restaurant people. So, I don't think we have reached equality in terms of financial status. I still think that -- and I've been so blessed, and lucky that I've had a good life, but I think a lot of my [01:17:00] fellow Latinos don't have that opportunity. So, I think that we need to elevate the financial status, and the life of a lot of our Latinos that are still living in poverty. Last year, I had a difficult issue, health-wise. I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I was very lucky to undergo treatment, very successfully. But at the same time, I'm thinking -- because I started doing some research about the incidents of breast cancer among Latina, and breast cancer is the second -- Latina women die more of breast cancer than any other affliction or sickness. And it is because they don't have access to mammograms, [01:18:00] and the testing. And we know that breast cancer could be early detected. Like in my case, that was. So, even when I was doing the research, there is inequality there. So, if you don't have good health insurance, then you don't detect cancer so, by the time you detect it -- the investment is even higher, because then you have to undergo a lot of chemo treatment, and that's more expensive. So, are we saving money by not providing good health insurance to people? And those are the things that

really are in my mind, in the back of my mind. I'm always so, grateful to my God, because I'm a very faithful person that I have been very lucky. But a lot of people have not. So, how do we alleviate those inequalities is still a big question. [01:19:00] In terms of education, the dropout rate of Latino students is also of great concern, even at the community college level. And it's not that our kids are not interested in getting their degree. They know that that's their way out of poverty. The problem is that they have multiple obligations. Sometimes, I have students that say, "My mom asked me to stay home because my sister is sick, and I needed to stay with her. My mom needed to go to work, because otherwise we don't put food on the table." And I'm like, "Okay, but I know, but coming to school is important." We have students that didn't have money for bus passes, so, we had a program that would give them a pass. So, transportation issues. Childcare issues. A lot of our people just live paycheck to paycheck. And [01:20:00] how do we elevate their lifestyle, so they don't have to go through that? It's a lot of my concern. And I always told my students, "The way is education. That's the best way." And I try to embed that in their minds. If you get a good education, you'll get a better job, and you will get out of poverty. And then you change the cycle of

poverty. And then the ones that came after you will be better off, because as soon as you change that cycle, everybody's better because then you can even go back and help your family. So, we had many successful stories at the college, but we also had our share of students dropping out. And again, some people say, "Well, they're not interested, or they're lazy." No. A lot of these kids really wanted to be there, it's just that it was not easy for them. Oh, and I haven't even told you more than 70 [01:21:00] percent of our Latino students went to school and had jobs. And sometimes I would ask them, "Okay, so, do you have a part-time job?" And they're like, "No, my job is full-time." So, they will go to school full-time. So, it's not simple and people say, "Well, it's just that they don't try to get out of property." It is hard to break the cycle. And we need to help people do that. And again, my motto has been, "Education, education, education."

JCS: Thank you so, much. Briefly, you said, "I'm a faithful person." How has faith, or has there been a part of Bethlehem, a faith community in Bethlehem that you found yourself a part of that has helped you or helped the Latino community or you and your family feel more a part of Bethlehem?

TD: [01:22:00] I have to say, I was raised Catholic, and I was baptized, and I got my first communion in elementary school. I went to Catholic elementary, and also middle school. It was not until high school that I went to public school. So, I was really raised with the nuns, and their traditions. And let me tell you, back then it was tough. But I still have the name of Sister Bernadette who taught me English. And a lot of discipline, and a lot of calligraphy. I have to say, my handwriting is so, much better because I took calligraphy classes. (laughs) So, I don't regret it. Also, being raised in the Catholic faith was, at some point, restrictive, because I do believe in stuff [01:23:00] that the Catholic church does not, and they condemn -- the latest thing was the Pope said that priests cannot bless GLBT marriages, and I'm against that. So, at some point what I did was, I started doing my own reading and picking and choosing what was it that really will fulfill my religious faith? So, I'm very spiritual and I do a lot of reading. When I feel the need to go to church, I go to Holy Infancy. I still feel, in my core values, Catholic, as my base, but at the same time, I've learned to accept that the best faith is the one that you have in communication directly with God. So, I feel that's the best relationship. [01:24:00] And I don't feel that I

have to congregate to do that. Most people do, I don't. So, I have always be very strong in my belief that we are not here by chance, that there is a mission, and that mission has to be accomplished, and if I don't, I will not fulfill what I'm supposed to be put in this Earth for. Every time I face adversity, I just say, "There will be a solution." My colleagues used to say, "Hey, we're going to miss your saying." I would always say, "All shall be well." And I've gone through my share of afflictions, and I always close my eyes and say, "This doesn't belong to me. This belongs to a higher power," and I put that there. And [01:25:00] I know I will find the strength and the energy that I need to find the answer. And I do. And I do. And you know, Janine, answers come to me. And I do meditate, and I do yoga, and that's when the answers come to me. When I'm in a meditative state I just put a question out there and it's like, "Wow." And the other day, I lost something, and I said, "Oh my God, where did I put that?" And I just (inaudible) and I said, "Just God, God show me where it is," and I opened my eyes, and I went to the place where it was. So, I always felt so, blessed and I always feel that I have good angels around me. (laughs) And that I've been so, blessed by that God and those angels and all the spiritual energy that is around me. And I also believe

that the universe conspires to bring to you what [01:26:00] you attract, too. So, I always try to avoid the bad. So, when I'm in this mode of injustice, I try to switch the mode to, "How can we make it just?" Because if you're thinking justice, that's what you're attracting, justice. So, I will always find ways to turn it into the positive, so, the positive gets to you. Because if you stay in the negative, man, what you attract? Oh, it's tough. And I've been there, also. And that energy is not good.

JCS: That's very profound. So, to think justice, you attract justice. And to live into your mission, which is what you're saying. Would you say, reflecting back on your life, that you are living into your mission? I mean you're not done yet, right? Just because you're retired doesn't mean you're done. Is that the thing you get when you're reflecting back, is that you [01:27:00] have faithfully lived into this mission, your advocacy work with the community?

TD: Yes. And maybe when I was facing the decision of retiring, I was saying to myself, "Number one, you feel like you do not generate any income," and sometimes, if you stay in the negative, sometimes that makes you feel -- because think about it. When you introduce yourself, what do you say first? It's your title. So, when I was thinking about

retirement, I said, "Well, what would be my title, then?" And it's interesting that I didn't even have to think about it, because the college gave me the title, which is "Professor Emeritus." But beyond that, it's about, "Can I continue doing some work even if I'm retired?" And anyway, I cannot sit in my house for the rest of my days because it's not in my nature. And so, slowly but surely, [01:28:00] I have been able to say, "Okay, so, what are the things that I can do and still enjoy retirement?" Because remember, I have my place in Puerto Rico, and now I'm going to have my grandchildren coming down soon, which is such a great blessing. And it's funny, because it's the universe conspiring, and that great God. I always wanted a grandchild, and I keep telling my kids -- because my kids are older now, it's like, "When are you going to have kids?" And within two weeks, two of them announced that they were going to have children. And I'm like, "Oh my God, you see how it multiplies your blessings? I wanted one and now I have two." So, that's how it happens. So, anyway, I decided to retire in May. Also, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer I said, "You know what? I need to undergo treatment and I really need to be relaxed." And it also gives you perspective. [01:29:00] "It's time to enjoy your retirement, because you've worked a long life

and now it's time to just take it a little bit easier."

Although some days, my husband and he goes, "Are you in a Zoom? Are you supposed to be in a Zoom meeting? Aren't you supposed to be retired?" So, what I've chosen is to really help Latino Leadership Alliance reinvigorate again, and I'm also very active with the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs that is facing many challenges because of the COVID pandemic. And I'm also, as a result of my breast cancer, the Pennsylvania Coalition for Breast Cancer did an outreach and said, "You're Latina, you've experienced this, can you be a spokesperson [01:30:00] for our community about what you went through?" And I said, "Sure, yes. I would love to tell my Latina hermanas: haz te mammografía, no dejes pasar un años sin hacerte la, porque es importante detectar el cancer," [01:30:10] so, I've been doing all those things. And here and there, when I read something in the paper that somebody needs help, I just do some outreach. So, I know my mission is not over, but I plan to downsize a little bit, especially when my grandchildren, because I figured that I would like to spend some time with my grandchildren, but even that will be a blessing, because my kids already said, "Mom make sure you talk to our kids in Spanish, because we want to make sure they know Spanish," and I said, "Of course, and I'm

planning to take them to Puerto Rico with me so, they can spend time in the island," because I think it's important that they know where they came from and who they are.

[01:31:00] And actually, it's funny, because we did our will, my husband and I, just to put our house in order, and we said in our will that they can sell our properties except our property in Puerto Rico, our condo, because we want to make sure that that's there in perpetuity, because that's their opportunity to go back to the island, and refresh, and re-energize and rediscover who they are. So, in our will, it says, "The property in Puerto Rico cannot be sold." And they were like, "Well, Mom, thank you, because in a way, that will keep that connection going forever."

JCS: That's so, beautiful. So, you're looking into this beautiful future with your grandchildren, and making sure that they know their roots, [01:32:00] that they can always go back to the motherland, right?

TD: Yes.

JCS: And so, is there anything else that you want the listeners to know? Anything that's part of your history that maybe we didn't cover?

TD: Well, let me say something in Spanish for the colleagues that would like to hear something. Mis colegas, Latinos, la

pelea y la lucha no ha sido facil. Hay días en que uno se siente como que callido. Pero la gran fé que nos unianos como pueblo, y nuestra cultura y nuestro idioma que ha permanecido en el caso por ejemplo de Puerto Rico que fue colonizado por Los Estados Unidos por muchos años, Los Puertorriqueños, nosotros mantenemos nuestro idioma, nuestra cultura Taína. Nosotros somos gente luchadoras que siempre han logrado este lucha con tal adversidades. Y nuestra gente, nuestra gente es tan linda y tan bondadosa y tan cariñosa. Y nosotros no tratamos de "como es tan linda" y mis hijos me pide la bendición, y yo lo pide la bendición a mi mamá porque eso de oír "Dios te bendiga," eso es un mensaje tan bonito. Así que yo que yo lo digo a mis compañeros Latina, no pierdas tu cultura, tu identidad, continua haciendo quien tu eres. Enseñala tus hijos la idioma, que te pidan la bendición. Enseñales cocinar tu comida, ponle la música. Y que nunca te olvides de donde tu vienes porque, que tu te quereas que tu te olvidas alguien te lo va recordar, y yo digo a mis hijos, alguien te va a recordar en el camino quien tu eres. Y es mejor que tu estés listo para aceptar quien eres y que no te coja de sorpresa que "como lo sabes que yo soy puertorriqueño?" Mira, esta mancha de platanos que nosotros tenemos, no se lo quita. Y ese orgullo, en el case mio, de ser

puertorriqueña eso no me lo quita nadie [inaudible] el encanto. Así que ten tu orgullo patrio, no importa cuantos años tu llevé [inaudible]. Solo continua la lucha porque la lucha no es solamente de nosotros. Es de los que vienen detrás. Y a mi me da tanto orgullo saber que los que vienen detrás, yo creo que tiene un poquito, el camino mas aliviado por lo que nosotros hemos hecho. Para mi ha sido un gran placer hacer lo. [01:32:21] [01:33:00] [01:34:00] So, my colleagues, Latinos, don't stop the fight. We are who we are. We're very proud of our language, our culture. Teach your kids to ask you for bendición. Teach your kids the culture, the language, and don't forget that the work is not done. I'm so, proud to say that I know that some of the ones that are going to come behind may have a little bit of a wider road because of the work that we've done, and I'm so, proud of that. We are a very resilient [01:35:00] race. We have never stopped believing in who we are, and our language. And that's what defines us. That's what makes us the people that we are. And don't you ever forget where you came from. Because I always tell my kids, "Somebody along the way is going to remind you who you are, and you better be ready to say, 'Yes, I am Puerto Rican and I'm a Latina, and I'm very proud of it.'" So, continue the fight. The fight is not over. And I'm just so, glad that

people like Janine will be there to continue doing and fighting the good fight. And thank you very much for this interview. It has been my pleasure to really relay my experience. And if it helps the ones that are listening to it, I am very, very, very honored to be heard by you. Thank you.

JCS: Thank you so, much, Teresa, for everything, for your story. And that's a beautiful way to end this, is to have pride in who you are [01:36:00] and be who you are. So, thank you. Thank you for everything. And so, we will be in contact again. I will send you a transcript as soon as I get it back, and you can go through it. It's really just for the purpose so, that people can look things up or search for certain things that you've talked about in the interview. So, it doesn't have to be perfect, but it's just to show you what you've (inaudible). Do you have any other questions for me before we go?

TD: I mean, que nos te grabando, ya todo esta grabando verdad?
[01:36:38]

JCS: So, they're going to cut it off where we ended. I'm going to turn off the recording now. I'll do that.

END OF AUDIO FILE